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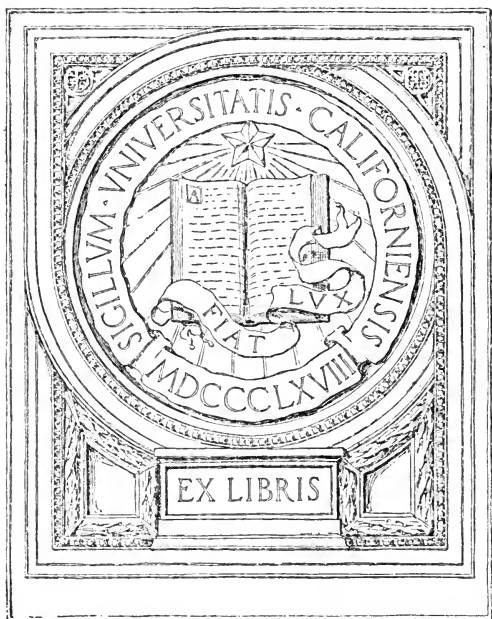
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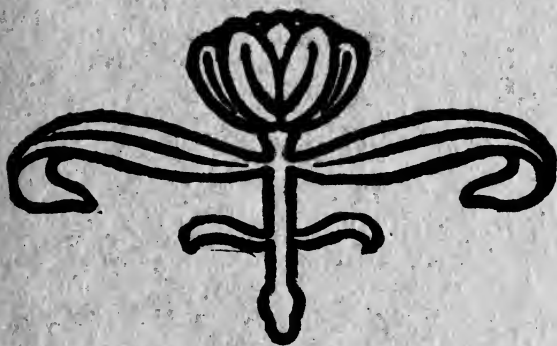
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HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

A SINGLE MAN



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A Single Man

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
Uniform with this Volume

MRS. GORRINGE'S NECKLACE

COUSIN KATE

THE MOLLUSC

CAPTAIN DREW ON LEAVE

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT

A Single Man

A New and Original Comedy
in Four Acts

By
HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

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BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1914



A Single Man

CHARACTERS

(*As originally produced, November 8, 1910, at
The Playhouse, London.*)

ROBIN WORTHINGTON	. . .	<i>Mr. Cyril Maude.</i>
HENRY WORTHINGTON	. . .	<i>Mr. Ernest Mainwaring.</i>
DICKIE COTTRELL	. . .	<i>Mr. Lionel Watts.</i>
LADY COTTRELL	. . .	<i>Miss Florence Haydon.</i>
MAGGIE COTTRELL	. . .	<i>Miss Dulcie Greatwich.</i>
MISS HESELTINE	. . .	<i>Miss Hilda Trevelyan.</i>
ISABELLA WORTHINGTON	. . .	<i>Miss Mary Ferrol.</i>
LOUISE PARKER	. . .	<i>Miss Nancy Price.</i>
BERTHA SIMS	. . .	<i>Miss Dorothy Dayne.</i>
THE HOUSEKEEPER	. . .	<i>Miss Emma Chambers.</i>
THE PARLORMAID	. . .	<i>Miss Vera Coburn.</i>
THE NURSE	. . .	<i>Miss Diana Sellick.</i>

The action, which covers a period of three weeks, takes place in Robin Worthington's house near Farnham in Surrey.

ACTS I, III AND IV.—The study.

ACT II.—The drawing-room.



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A Single Man

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—ROBIN WORTHINGTON'S *study*. A broad French window affords a view of a large, well-kept garden. It is towards the end of the month of May, so that the garden looks at its freshest and brightest with flowering trees in bloom. The room looks comfortable and much used, and is distinctly a man's room. There are bookshelves on either side of the window. Almost facing the audience is ROBIN'S writing-table; a good-sized table, with all the necessary things for writing, and littered with letters and pamphlets. By the writing-table there is a small typewriter's desk. It has drawers down one side and a typewriter's machine, with a cover on, upon it. Other furniture completes the scene. Near a settee in front of ROBIN'S writing-table there is a cradle on rockers containing a baby. Lying near the cradle on the floor, as if they had been flung there, are a Teddy-

bear, a rag-doll, and a rattle. On the settee lies a small case of needles and cottons and a baby's bonnet with rosettes and ribbon strings in the process of making.

ISABELLA WORTHINGTON, a bright attractive young woman of almost thirty, is on her knees beside the cradle.

ISABELLA.

[*To the baby.*] Coochy, coochy, coochy! [*Putting her head close to the baby.*] Bo! [*She picks up the Teddy-bear and holds it up for the baby to look at as she makes a poor imitation of a dog barking fiercely.*] Wow, wow, wow! [*She throws the Teddy-bear on the floor and bends solicitously over the cradle.*] Did muizzer fichen baby? Muizzer didn't mean to fichen baby. [CAPTAIN HENRY WORTHINGTON enters from the garden. HENRY is a cavalry officer, a good-looking, pleasant man of thirty-five with conventional mind and manners. He wears a tweed suit and is smoking a pipe. He strolls down to the cradle.] Dada! Here's dada! Here's baby's dada. [*Looking up at HENRY.*] Look at her, Henry. Doesn't she look sweet?

HENRY.

[*Smiling at the baby.*] Hullo, babs. [*He pokes the baby.*] Tsch!

ISABELLA.

[*In an ecstasy.*] Did you see her smile ?

HENRY.

[*Giving the baby a series of little pokes.*]
Tsch, tsch, tsch !

ISABELLA.

Don't do it any more, dear. It might not agree with her. [*Rocks the cradle gently.*]

HENRY.

I say, Isabella.

ISABELLA.

[*Brightly.*] What is it, dearest ?

HENRY.

Do you think you ought to be in this room ?

ISABELLA.

Why not ?

HENRY.

Robin may not like to have his study turned into a nursery.

ISABELLA.

I shouldn't think he'd mind when it's for baby.

HENRY.

Look at the floor.

ISABELLA.

Those are baby's playthings. She threw them all there herself. [*Gushingly to the baby.*] Clever little girlie !

HENRY.

Robin will be coming in directly and want to begin his morning's work. I think we'd better clear out.

ISABELLA.

Very well, dear—we will—[*as she sits on the settee*] by and by.

HENRY.

It's ten o'clock.

ISABELLA.

A literary man has no fixed hour for beginning work. He waits till the spirit moves him. It's not as if Robin had to turn out on parade, punctual to the minute, like you.

[*Takes up her needle and cotton from the seat beside her and begins to stitch the rosettes and strings on the bonnet.*]

HENRY.

No—but still—we must take care not to be in his way. It's very kind of him to have us here. I don't want him to think we are making too free with his house.

ISABELLA.

I think it is so sweet of you, Henry, the way you never forget that you are the *younger* brother.

HENRY.

[*Smiling.*] I learnt my place at school when Robin was Worthington Major and I was Worthington Minor.

ISABELLA.

[*Sewing as she talks.*] I should think our happy little family of three makes a very bright spot in his dull, gray bachelor life. The other day—which day would it be? How long have we been staying with Robin?

HENRY.

[*Without looking up from a newspaper he has picked up.*] Four days.

ISABELLA.

Yes. Then it was the day before yesterday—I was sitting here with baby, and I could see Robin, sitting at his desk, watching us. He didn't say a word—but I knew so well what was passing in his mind. He was thinking it must be very nice to have a young wife sitting in his study while he works, and a little baby-waby—lovidovickins!

[*She finishes her speech with her head in the cradle.*]

HENRY.

[*Turning his newspaper.*] I should think Robin will always remain a bachelor.

ISABELLA.

Don't you think a man is much happier for being married?

HENRY.

[*Smiling at ISABELLA.*] Yes—if he finds the right woman.

ISABELLA.

[*Smiling at HENRY.*] Of course.

HENRY.

Perhaps Robin hasn't had my luck, or perhaps he has been too busy writing books to think about getting married.

ISABELLA.

[*Dropping her sewing, and saying thoughtfully.*] He needs the idea put into his head. It's what you and I ought to do while we are on this visit.

HENRY.

[*Shaking his head.*] I never believe in taking a hand in other people's love affairs.

ISABELLA.

What do you think of Louise Parker?

HENRY.

[*Having forgotten who she is, echoes.*] Louise Parker!

ISABELLA.

You remember *her*. She was at school with me and she was to have been one of our bridesmaids, only she had influenza.

HENRY.

Oh, yes. I remember.

ISABELLA.

[*Resuming her sewing.*] Poor Louise! She must be nearly thirty and she's never been engaged. I shouldn't think she's ever even had a proposal. I'm sure she'd have told me if she had. I thought it would be so nice for her if Robin fell in love with her.

HENRY.

[*Good-humouredly.*] I don't see why my poor brother should take up with an *old* girl who can't get anybody else.

ISABELLA.

Louise isn't *old*, dear; she's *my* age—and she's very handsome. You've seen that photograph I have of her, with her hair done out at the sides, clutching a piece of white tulle in front. She looks lovely—and she isn't *very* much flat-

tered—not if she is as handsome as she used to be—though of course I've seen next to nothing of her since we've been spending our winters in Egypt.

HENRY.

No—I suppose not.

ISABELLA.

Then I thought—having a little money of her own would make it so much better.

HENRY.

Robin is well enough off now not to think about that.

ISABELLA.

It would make Louise more independent.

HENRY.

You are only looking at it from *her* point of view.

ISABELLA.

[*Her hand on his.*] No, dear, I'm not—but you see—poor Louise is the only one of the old school set who hasn't been able to find a husband.

[HENRY *laughs, and gives ISABELLA a little caress.*

HENRY.

I don't see how you propose to bring them together. If I remember rightly—Louise lives at Leamington while here we are at Farnham.

ISABELLA.

Louise might come from Leamington to Farnham.

HENRY.

True.

ISABELLA.

I don't see why she shouldn't be asked on a little visit.

HENRY.

Where?

ISABELLA.

Here.

HENRY.

To this house?

ISABELLA.

Yes; I thought if Robin saw Louise in his own home it might help to put the idea into his head.

HENRY.

But Louise can't come on a visit to Robin!

ISABELLA.

Yes, she can—with *me* here. Robin's sister-in-law and Louise's oldest friend. It would be quite all right. I'm sure Louise wouldn't mind.

HENRY.

Robin might.

ISABELLA.

I thought I could say to Robin, that as you and I have no fixed home in England, perhaps he wouldn't mind if I invited my old friend, Louise Parker, to spend a few days with me here. I don't see how he could say No to that.

HENRY.

You haven't asked him yet?

ISABELLA.

No—but I've asked Louise.

HENRY.

You haven't!

ISABELLA.

Didn't I tell you? I wrote to her the day before yesterday. I told her to put off *everything*, and come on here *immediately*. I gave her the most glowing account of Robin. I should feel so happy if I were the means of bringing them together.

HENRY.

[*Gravely.*] I think you ought to have spoken to Robin before inviting her.

ISABELLA.

[*Penitently.*] Yes, dear, I see that now.

HENRY.

He may not want her here.

ISABELLA.

[*Seriously.*] That's my difficulty. I don't know what I shall do if Robin says he won't have Louise here.

HENRY.

Put her off.

ISABELLA.

It's too late. She's in the train. She'll be here in three-quarters of an hour. Yes; I received an eight-page letter from her this morning. Of course when I told her to come immediately, I never expected she'd come at once. [HENRY *smiles in spite of himself.* ISABELLA, *seeing HENRY smile, cheers up.*] Dear Louise! She's so delighted with everything I told her about Robin. She seems to look upon herself as engaged to him already.

HENRY.

You'd better say something to Robin without delay.

ISABELLA.

Yes, I suppose we had.

[*She kneels and rocks the cradle. ROBIN WORTHINGTON comes in from the garden. He is a pleasant, wise, reticent and sweet-tempered man of forty-three years old.*]

ROBIN.

Hullo!

HENRY.

Hullo, Robin!

ROBIN.

Don't disturb yourselves. I can't do anything until my secretary comes.

[*ROBIN turns over some papers on his desk, smiling broadly to himself. ISABELLA looks at HENRY, who makes faces at her, and nods, meaning that she must tell ROBIN about LOUISE.*]

ISABELLA.

[*With an effort.*] I have a great friend—
Louise Parker her name is—— [*She stops*

short when she looks at ROBIN and sees him smiling broadly to himself.] What are you smiling at?

ROBIN.

[*Diffidently.*] I came in here for the express purpose of asking you both something—and now I don't like to.

HENRY.

Go on.

ROBIN.

You won't laugh?

HENRY.

No.

ISABELLA.

Of course not.

ROBIN.

Well, then—— [*Looking from one to the other.*] Do you think I'm too old to get married?

ISABELLA.

No.

HENRY.

No.

ROBIN.

I want you to say what you really think.

HENRY.

We *are* doing.

ISABELLA.

You are not at all too old to marry.

ROBIN.

I don't mean—I mean a girl.

HENRY.

Of course.

ISABELLA.

So do *we*.

ROBIN.

I don't think I've any time to waste. I'm forty-three.

HENRY.

I thought you were forty-four.

ROBIN.

[*Quite annoyed.*] No, I'm not. I'm only forty-three.

ISABELLA.

[*Complacently.*] Is it seeing *us* that has made you want so much to get married?

ROBIN.

Partly—and partly it's the spring. How can I keep my mind off marriage when all the woods and fields are filled with family life? I get the same unsettled feeling regularly every year.

HENRY.

I used to get it before I was married.

ROBIN.

All the bachelors do in the pairing season. I've no doubt *my case is* a good deal aggravated this year with watching you two and the baby. Do you know before you arrived—I rather expected your domestic happiness might irritate me, but—[*he smiles at them both*] I find it extremely attractive. It makes me quite jealous.

ISABELLA.

[*Beckoning HENRY to her she whispers to him while ROBIN'S back is turned.*] He's absolutely ripe for Louise.

HENRY.

[*As ROBIN turns to them.*] I've often wondered how it is you've escaped so long. You used to be constantly falling in love.

ROBIN.

That was before I could afford to marry. I got over them all. One can't miss for long

something one never had. Since the days that *you* remember I've been so busy getting on in the world, and so afraid that marriage would interfere with my work, that I haven't encouraged myself to think of it. But now that I *have* got on—I seem to have come to a kind of full stop. Nothing matters as much as it did; my friends don't; my career doesn't. A great many bachelors experience the same sort of feeling round about forty. It's not pleasant: it's alarming. I ought not to be losing my grip on life *yet*—but to retain it I need a new interest—an interest outside myself. I need—*[indicating ISABELLA who is gently rocking the cradle]* that's what I need.

[He goes up to the window, and out into the garden a few steps, standing with his back towards HENRY and ISABELLA. HENRY goes to ISABELLA and sits beside her.]

HENRY.

Hadn't you better tell him about Louise?

ISABELLA.

If I tell him *now*—after what he's been saying—he'll think I've asked her here on purpose for him to fall in love with—and that makes a man so angry.

HENRY.

Pretend you've asked her here because *I'm* so fond of her.

ISABELLA.

No, Henry, I won't!

HENRY.

You *must* tell him she's coming.

ISABELLA.

I know I must.

HENRY.

Shall *I* tell him?

ISABELLA.

No, I'll tell him.

HENRY.

Well, tell him.

ISABELLA.

I'm going to.

[*Enter* GLADYS, a young parlour-maid.

GLADYS.

[*Addressing* ROBIN.] Miss Cottrell has called, sir, and would like to see you.

ROBIN.

Oh! Show her in here, please.

GLADYS.

Yes, sir.

[*She goes out.*]

ISABELLA.

[*In a quick whisper to HENRY.*] How annoying: just when I was going to tell him about Louise!

ROBIN.

[*Addressing them both.*] It's Lady Cottrell's little girl—Maggie. They are neighbours of mine.

[*MAGGIE COTTRELL enters. MAGGIE is a very pretty, healthy, smiling girl of seventeen, full of vitality. She carries a basket of grapes.*]

MAGGIE.

Good-morning!

ROBIN.

[*Meeting MAGGIE and shaking hands with her.*] Good-morning, Maggie.

MAGGIE.

Mother thought you might like these few grapes. [*She offers the grapes to ROBIN.*]

ROBIN.

[*Taking the basket.*] That's very kind of you. [*Lays the basket on his writing-table.*]

Please thank your mother very much. Let me introduce you to my sister-in-law, Mrs. Worthington.

ISABELLA.

[*Shaking hands with MAGGIE.*] How d'you do?

MAGGIE.

Quite well, thank you.

ROBIN.

[*Introducing MAGGIE to the cradle.*] My niece—Miss Pamela Grace Mary Worthington—Miss Maggie Cottrell.

MAGGIE.

[*Peering at the baby.*] What a sweet little kiddie!

[*Rocks the cradle violently from side to side.*]

ISABELLA.

[*Alarmed.*] Stop, stop! Don't do that!

[*She snatches the baby out of the cradle.*]

MAGGIE.

I thought they liked it.

ISABELLA.

[*Trying to be pleasant about it.*] You were doing it just a trifle—violently.

MAGGIE.

I'm so sorry !

ISABELLA.

It doesn't matter.

MAGGIE.

[*Peering at the baby.*] It is a little love.

ROBIN.

When you've done adoring the baby, this is my brother—Captain Worthington.

[HENRY and MAGGIE shake hands.]

HENRY.

How do you do ?

MAGGIE.

Quite well, thank you. [*To ISABELLA.*]
May I look at its toes ?

ISABELLA.

[*Proudly exhibiting the baby's toes.*] There !

MAGGIE.

Aren't they ducks ?

[*She touches them with her forefinger.*]

ROBIN.

[*To HENRY, smiling as he watches ISABELLA and MAGGIE.*] Isn't she charming ?

HENRY.

Isabella ?

ROBIN.

Maggie.

[He continues smiling benevolently at MAGGIE as he watches her.]

MAGGIE.

[To ISABELLA.] May I hold it ?

ISABELLA.

Certainly—if you'd like to. *[She gives the baby to MAGGIE to hold.]* You'll be very careful, won't you ?

MAGGIE.

Trust me. *[MAGGIE sits smiling at the baby. ROBIN sits watching MAGGIE and smiling all the time. MAGGIE to the baby.]* Puss, puss, puss !

ROBIN.

[Murmuring as he watches MAGGIE.] Charming !

MAGGIE.

[Looking at ROBIN.] What d'you say ?

ROBIN.

[Slightly confused.] Nothing—I was only thinking—nothing. *[To ISABELLA.]* Wouldn't she make rather a good study for a Madonna ?

ISABELLA.

Not in a hat.

MAGGIE.

[*To make conversation, says to ISABELLA.*]
What do you feed it on?

[*ROBIN and HENRY glance at each other, embarrassed.*]

ISABELLA.

Beef and potatoes.

[*ROBIN and HENRY again glance at each other, then look away, trying not to smile.*]

MAGGIE.

[*Suddenly thrusting the baby from her.*] Oh!
It's going to have convulsions.

ISABELLA.

[*Hurrying to MAGGIE, snatches the baby from her. She tries to be polite, but is visibly annoyed.*]
It's because you are not holding her properly. Give her to me, please—thank you. [*She carries the baby towards the window, jiggling it.*]
Did she say we were going to have convulsions?
Tell the naughty lady it was because she didn't nurse us nicely.

[*A nurse appears at the window and remains a few minutes in conversation with ISABELLA. She carries a shawl.*]

HENRY *joins them.* After a few moments the NURSE takes the baby from ISABELLA and disappears into the garden with it. While they are thus occupied, MAGGIE speaks to ROBIN.

MAGGIE.

I'm not much of a hand with a baby. I think I'd better be getting home.

ROBIN.

Don't go yet. What have you been doing lately?

MAGGIE.

Playing tennis most of the time and larking about generally. We had great fun last evening—tobogganing down the stairs on tea-trays.

ROBIN.

Who was with you?

MAGGIE.

Dickie, and one or two other boys, and Flossie, and Bertha Sims. We call ourselves the gang. [*Holding out her hand.*] Good-bye.

ROBIN.

[*Taking her hand and retaining it.*] Good-bye, Maggie.

MAGGIE.

Shall I take the basket back with me, or call again ?

ROBIN.

Call again—soon.

MAGGIE.

I'll come back for it in about twenty minutes.
[*She withdraws her hand and goes towards*
ISABELLA.] Good-bye, Mrs. Worthington.

ISABELLA.

Good-bye.

MAGGIE.

Good-bye.

HENRY.

Good-bye, Miss Cottrell.

ROBIN.

[*Moving to open the door for her.*] When you come back—don't ask for the basket—ask for me.

MAGGIE.

Right !

[MAGGIE goes out ; ROBIN closes the door after her, then turns to HENRY and ISABELLA.]

ROBIN.

That's the girl I was telling you about.

ISABELLA.

[*Puzzled.*] What girl?

HENRY.

I don't remember you telling us about any girl.

ROBIN.

I was beginning to, when—in she came. Wasn't it a coincidence?

ISABELLA.

[*After a look at HENRY.*] You are not telling us you intend to marry Miss Cottrell?

ROBIN.

[*Shyly.*] I thought of doing so. [ISABELLA and HENRY look at each other in surprise. ISABELLA'S surprise amounts to dismay.] Don't you like her?

HENRY.

She's charming.

ISABELLA.

Very pretty—but isn't she rather too young for you?

ROBIN.

No; I may be too old for her, but she's not at all too young for me. That's what I want — youth and sunshine. It would keep me young. [*Taking HENRY by the arm and pointing to the garden.*] Think of Maggie running about that garden, springing over the flower beds in pursuit of butterflies. [*Dropping HENRY'S arm he says with enthusiasm.*] The very vision of it makes me feel almost a boy.

ISABELLA.

If you really were a boy —

ROBIN.

[*Interrupting her.*] If I really were a boy, I should see nothing so wonderful in youth. One needs to have reached *my* age to realize its charm.

[*ROBIN sits at his table and begins fussing with papers.*]

HENRY.

[*Impressed with ROBIN'S last remark, says to ISABELLA.*] There's a world of truth in that, Isabella.

ISABELLA.

[*Much more impressed by her own idea, says carelessly.*] Oh, yes, there is. [*Going nearer*

to ROBIN.] But though you look so boyish for your age——

ROBIN.

A man is as old as he looks.

ISABELLA.

Feels.

ROBIN.

You don't know how old I feel.

ISABELLA.

But Henry and I can't help being a little afraid—that if you married any one so young as Miss Cottrell—you might miss the companionship we hoped you would find—in marriage with some older and more intellectual woman.

ROBIN.

I don't want a wife with ideas. She'd argue with me.

HENRY.

[*Speaking across* ROBIN *to* ISABELLA.] I have noticed, Isabella, that clever men often choose stupid wives.

ROBIN.

[*Indignantly to* HENRY.] She's *not* stupid.

ISABELLA.

[*Bluntly.*] She has no idea what to do with a baby.

ROBIN.

[*A little shocked and embarrassed.*] My dear Isabella—how you do run on! I don't think we ought to discuss this matter so prematurely. I have no reason to suppose that Maggie takes the slightest interest in me. [*He smiles as he continues.*] At least—I hadn't—till this morning.

HENRY.

This morning?

ROBIN.

Yes.

ISABELLA.

Something she said?

ROBIN.

No.

HENRY.

What then?

ROBIN.

[*Pointing to the basket of grapes.*] Those grapes! What do I want with grapes? I'm

not ill. It's merely an excuse of Maggie's to come and see me. I feel greatly encouraged.

[*He becomes absorbed in the papers on his desk.*]

ISABELLA.

Didn't you hear her say it was her mother who sent her with the grapes?

ROBIN.

Maggie is quite sharp enough, and quite independent enough to send the grapes by the gardener if she didn't want to bring them herself.

ISABELLA.

That may be, but —

ROBIN.

Suppose we drop Maggie and the grapes. I'm rather sorry I said anything about either of them. I don't think I ought to have done so. [*Beside ISABELLA and very pleasantly.*] You were beginning to tell me something about somebody when I first came in.

[*HENRY stands watching them to see how ISABELLA gets on.*]

ISABELLA.

About my old friend, Louise Parker.

ROBIN.

Oh, yes.

ISABELLA.

Such a nice girl.

ROBIN.

Really!

ISABELLA.

I'm sure you'd like her.

ROBIN.

I'm sure I should.

ISABELLA.

I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind if I invited her to come and see me here.

ROBIN.

Of course, my dear Isabella—any friends of yours would be most welcome.

ISABELLA.

Thank you. Should you object if Louise stayed a few days?

ROBIN.

[*Delighted.*] The very thing! It would be an excuse to invite Maggie.

ISABELLA.

Oh !

[*She looks at HENRY in dismay. HENRY laughs at ISABELLA'S face of dismay.*]

ROBIN.

[*Goes on without heeding them and delighted with his own idea.*] Why, yes—don't you see—if you have a girl friend staying in the house, Maggie might be running backwards and forwards all day long. She has nothing to do. When do you want Miss—Miss—your friend to come ?

ISABELLA.

She's coming this morning. I took the liberty of ——

ROBIN.

[*Interrupting her.*] I'm so glad you did. Nothing could be more fortunate. I'll go and tell Mrs. Higson to get a room ready. [*He goes towards the door.*] Maggie might come to tea this afternoon. [*He goes out.*]

ISABELLA.

[*As soon as the door is closed.*] Oh, Henry, can't you do something ?

HENRY.

Why shouldn't he marry Maggie ?

ISABELLA.

[*Indignantly.*] Henry!

HENRY.

I've known several cases of men marrying girls half their age that turned out very well indeed.

ISABELLA.

But what am I to say to Louise?

HENRY.

Louise hasn't got an option on him.

ISABELLA.

Don't make jokes about it, dear; she'll be here in less than half an hour.

HENRY.

Louise must take her chance. I should think when we've been here a little longer, we shall find that the neighbourhood bristles with women who want to marry Robin.

[*Re-enter* ROBIN.

ROBIN.

I'm sorry, but I shall have to ask you to leave me now. Miss Heseltine is coming.

ISABELLA.

[*Suspiciously.*] Who's Miss Heseltine?

ROBIN.

My secretary.

[He sits at the writing-table and gets a pen and paper.]

ISABELLA.

Do you have a woman secretary?

[She glances at HENRY.]

ROBIN.

Yes. I've been taking more or less of a holiday since *you* came. That's how it is you haven't seen her.

ISABELLA.

[After another significant glance at HENRY.]
Is she pretty?

ROBIN.

I really don't know. I think so. I see her so much I forget what she's like.

ISABELLA.

That's absurd!

ROBIN.

It's quite true. You see—I'm always working when she's here. It's like thinking aloud to talk to Miss Heseltine. I feel just as comfortable with *her* in the room as if she wasn't there.

[He begins to write.]

HENRY.

Come along, Isabella. He wants to get to work.

ISABELLA.

[*Joining HENRY.*] Very well. I shall have to go to the station directly to meet Louise.

[*They go out.* ROBIN *is absorbed in his writing, and does not look up as* MISS HESELTINE *enters.*

[*Enter MISS HESELTINE.* *She is a sweet-faced woman of twenty-eight, with unobtrusive manners but plenty of character and determination. She is neatly and very plainly dressed, and carries a note-book in her hand. She moves about in a quick, business-like fashion.*

MISS HESELTINE.

Good-morning, Mr. Worthington.

ROBIN.

Good-morning, Miss Heseltine.

[*MISS HESELTINE expresses disapproval as she sees the Teddy-bear, rag-doll, and rattle lying on the floor.*

MISS HESELTINE.

Tsch, tsch, tsch!

[*She gathers up the Teddy-bear, rag-doll,*

rattle, work-box, and the baby's bonnet, pitches them all into the cradle; drags it to the corner. She then seats herself at her desk, takes the cover off her typewriter, and gets two sheets of paper from the drawer of the desk.

ROBIN.

Where did we leave off last time?

MISS HESELTINE.

We were writing that article on fossils.

ROBIN.

I don't feel at all like fossils to-day.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Putting the paper in the machine.*] We don't need to send it in before Friday.

ROBIN.

I have an idea for a poem.

MISS HESELTINE.

Some more of those topical verses?

ROBIN.

No—just an ordinary little poem about love.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Taking a swift surprised look at ROBIN before she speaks.*] Quite a new departure.

ROBIN.

Take this down.

[*He paces the room, thoughtfully, before speaking. He then begins to dictate, soulfully.*

Come hither, my beloved,

[*MISS HESELTINE makes a short, sharp, businesslike attack on the keys of her machine. ROBIN continues as before.*

With shining, smiling eyes,

[*MISS HESELTINE repeats the attack. ROBIN continues as before.*

And soft sweet lips —

[*Again MISS HESELTINE types. ROBIN drops the far-away voice in which he has dictated the poem.*

ROBIN.

It's no good. I can't concentrate my mind. It's all in a turmoil. Tear it up, please, will you? [*He stands at the window, looking out into the garden with his back to her. MISS HESELTINE takes the sheet of paper out of the machine, moves her lips as she reads the poem over to herself with an affectionate smile.*

ROBIN'S attention is obviously attracted by something he sees in the garden. He speaks without turning round.] How pretty!

MISS HESELTINE.

Are you still dictating?

[She hurriedly folds up the sheet of paper with the poem on it.]

ROBIN.

No. I was watching the housemaid flirting with the postman. There's nothing so charming to see as a pair of lovers. [MISS HESELTINE smiles to herself as she tucks the poem into the bosom of her dress. ROBIN comes towards his desk, idly turning over a sheet or two of paper to cover the embarrassment he feels in saying the following.] It may surprise you—what I am going to ask you [MISS HESELTINE is very attentive], but—I want to get married. [MISS HESELTINE is so surprised she drops her ruler on the floor with a clatter. ROBIN hurries to pick it up for her. She rises, picks it up, and sits again.] The girl I want to marry is some one I've known very well for a long time. I've been in the habit of seeing her constantly, but hitherto—we have only been on friendly terms. [MISS HESELTINE nods her head, gravely.] I'd like to get on to sentimental terms with her. [MISS HESELTINE nods her head, smiling.]

It's always a little difficult to change a long-established friendly relationship into a sentimental one—not difficult exactly—but it needs careful handling. You see what I mean?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Dropping her eyes.*] I think I do.

ROBIN.

I'm afraid I may make the transition too abruptly—startle her—perhaps even frighten her away. So I want you to help me if you will.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Looking up at him.*] How?

ROBIN.

Before asking her the definite question I should so like to find out—if possible—whether *she* has anything more than a friendly feeling for *me*.

MISS HESELTINE.

Have you no idea?

ROBIN.

None—at least—very little.

MISS HESELTINE.

Perhaps you have given her no direct sign of the change in your feelings towards *her*.

ROBIN.

No ; I haven't.

MISS HESELTINE.

Then I don't see what *she* can do.

ROBIN.

You think, then, that she may be in love with me without showing it ?

MISS HESELTINE.

I'm quite sure of that.

ROBIN.

She may want to but be afraid to ?

MISS HESELTINE.

That's it.

ROBIN.

[*Moving about restlessly.*] A man can feel just as shy about breaking the ice as a girl. It would be dreadful to get a rebuff. She might laugh in my face. Girls have been known to be very unfeeling towards middle-aged suitors. They think it's funny to lead them on till they get a proposal and give a refusal—and then they go and tell their friends about it. [*He picks up a letter and folds it nervously.*] I don't want to risk anything of that sort—so I was wondering if you'd be so kind as to say something first.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Taken aback.*] Me speak first? [*Turning away from him.*] Oh, no—I couldn't!

ROBIN.

[*Coming and standing close to her shoulder.*] I only mean—if you could help me to find out in some way—what kind of an answer I should be likely to get. [*He pauses.*] It's Maggie Cottrell. [MISS HESELTINE *must express, unseen by ROBIN, the grief and disappointment she feels in learning that it is MAGGIE he has meant and not herself.*] You know Maggie Cottrell? [MISS HESELTINE *bends her head.*] She's a friend of yours? [MISS HESELTINE *bends her head again.*] A great friend?

MISS HESELTINE.

We are not in the same position, of course, but she has always been kind to me and taken notice of me.

ROBIN.

Has she ever given you any confidences?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes.

ROBIN.

[*Shyly.*] Anything about me?

MISS HESELTINE.

No.

ROBIN.

[*With a little note of disappointment.*] Oh!
[*Moving away as he says, thoughtfully.*] That might either mean that she takes no interest in me at all, or that it's too deep for words. [*To MISS HESELTINE again.*] Are you sure you wouldn't mind?

MISS HESELTINE.

I should like to do whatever would please you, but—do you think I'm the best person for this?

ROBIN.

You are the *only* person. I don't know any one else I could ask such a thing of. I never feel shy with *you*. I was telling my brother just now—it's like thinking aloud to talk to *you*.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Quietly.*] I'm glad you feel *that*.

ROBIN.

[*Not noticing MISS HESELTINE, he says smiling to himself.*] Dear Maggie—so young and so pretty. [MISS HESELTINE rises. He had almost forgotten her presence for a moment in thinking of MAGGIE. He turns to her smiling apologetically.] I beg your pardon.

MISS HESELTINE.

Forgive me for what I am going to ask you. [*She goes to him and says, very gravely.*] You are quite, *quite* sure that this would be for your happiness and your good?

ROBIN.

Yes. I'm *quite* sure. I've thought it all out. It's so dull here, and I'm becoming *such* an old fogey. If Maggie would have me she'd cheer me up as nobody else could. She'd be the re-making of me.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Quietly.*] I'll do what you want me to do.

ROBIN.

It's very kind of you, Miss Heseltine. You can approach the subject quite lightly, you know—almost chaffingly.

MISS HESELTINE.

Oh, no, I couldn't do it that way. If I do it at all—I must do it seriously.

[*The front door bell rings.*]

ROBIN.

Maggie come back for her basket. I'll slip out and leave her with *you*. [*He goes towards the window.*] If you want an excuse for me not being in my study [*seizing the basket of*

grapes] I've gone into the pantry to put these grapes on a dish. That'll look very natural.

[He goes out hurriedly. Re-enter MAGGIE by the door.]

MAGGIE.

[Coming just inside the room.] Isn't Mr. Worthington here?

MISS HESELTINE.

He's gone to get your basket.

MAGGIE.

Oh!

MISS HESELTINE.

Will you stay and talk to me?

MAGGIE.

Yes—with pleasure.

[She sits on the settee watching MISS HESELTINE and waiting for her to begin the conversation. MISS HESELTINE slowly approaches MAGGIE and then sits beside her.]

MISS HESELTINE.

Have you ever thought of marriage?

MAGGIE.

[Cheerfully.] Oh, yes—often and often.

MISS HESELTINE.

Thought what it means—to leave your present life behind you and go and live his life with *him*? You'd have to love him very much to do that.

MAGGIE.

I should say so.

MISS HESELTINE.

Perhaps you've already asked yourself whether there's any one you'd be willing to give up everything for? [MAGGIE *smiles knowingly sideways at* MISS HESELTINE.] Do you sometimes ask yourself that question?

MAGGIE.

Every time I meet a nice-looking man.

MISS HESELTINE.

Then you've never thought of any man seriously?

MAGGIE.

Are you alluding to Mr. Worthington?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Rather taken back and embarrassed.*] Well, yes—I—did mean ——

MAGGIE.

Did *he* ask you to—to?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes—to ——

MAGGIE.

Sound me.

MISS HESELTINE.

That's it.

MAGGIE.

[*Pleased and surprised.*] Well, I never!

MISS HESELTINE.

You may think it's funny for *me* to sound you ——

MAGGIE.

I didn't think of that. What made him pitch on *you*?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*With a touch of pride.*] I know him better than any one else does. I'm only his secretary of course, but I've been working for him for five years now, and what with dictating to me, and talking about his work to me, and saying his thoughts aloud to me ——

MAGGIE.

[*With no idea of giving offense.*] He has come to look upon *you*, I suppose, as part of your machine.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Meekly.*] That's it.

MAGGIE.

[*Impulsively seizing MISS HESELTINE by the arm.*] Go on—tell me—what else did he say? [*Wriggling towards her.*

MISS HESELTINE.

That's all. He just wanted me to find out if there was any hope for him.

MAGGIE.

[*Whispering loudly in MISS HESELTINE'S ear.*] Tell him "Yes."

MISS HESELTINE.

Have you made up your mind already?

MAGGIE.

Ages ago. Mother and I have frequently discussed the probabilities. [*Giggling.*] "Mrs. Worthington"—just think of it!

[*She laughs and kicks out her feet in front.*

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Looking at her gravely.*] I shouldn't have thought it would make you laugh.

MAGGIE.

[*Sweetly.*] Why shouldn't I laugh if I'm happy ?

MISS HESELTINE.

I thought when you heard that a man like Mr. Worthington wanted to make you his dear wife—you'd feel more like going on your knees.

MAGGIE.

[*Impressed.*] Of course it has its serious side.

MISS HESELTINE.

That's what I want you to see—if you don't think I'm taking a liberty in saying so. I'm older than *you*, and I've had a harder life than *you*. There were many things at my home to make me grow up sad and serious minded: it's all been bright for *you*. *You've* had no occasion yet to take life seriously—but you will have when you marry. You'll find him difficult to understand at times—moody, and even a little irritable, like all very clever people are; then you must be patient, and remember that your husband is a great man. Some days he'll take himself off to the clouds, and then, if you think of yourself more than him, you'll be saying, "I might as well not exist for all the notice he takes of me." Those are the hardest times—the times when he doesn't seem to notice your

existence. But if you take a kind of pride in keeping quiet and not bothering him, and not letting other people bother him—it'll make it easier for you. It'll all be quite easy if you love him enough. That's what it needs—real love—deep love [*bending forward she takes her hands*], love that knows how to wait patiently. Look after him well—won't you? [*Her voice falters.*] Excuse me preaching you such a sermon. [*Re-enter ROBIN, with the empty basket. MISS HESELTINE goes towards him.*] I've done what you wanted me to [*ROBIN smiles*], and now, if you don't mind, I'll go home. I've got a headache. [*Exit MISS HESELTINE quickly.*]

ROBIN.

[*Looking after MISS HESELTINE.*] I'm so sorry, Miss Heseltine, so very sorry! [*He turns to MAGGIE, who rose when he entered. They are both exceedingly embarrassed and stand smiling foolishly at each other. After a pause he says.*] Well—Maggie.

MAGGIE.

[*Looking at the ground.*] Well—Robin.

[*ROBIN looks at the basket in his hand, then looks about him for a place to deposit it, makes a few hesitating movements, and finally puts it on the writing-table and comes towards MAGGIE.*]

ROBIN.

[*Very nicely and gently.*] You are very sweet. [MAGGIE *puts up her face expecting to be kissed; he kisses her.*] Dear Maggie, I am very much touched that you care for me. [MAGGIE, *smiling, sits on the settee. He sits, taking her hand and looking at it.*] What dear little hands! [*He puts his arm round her waist and kisses her again.*]

[*The door is suddenly thrown open. Enter ISABELLA, followed by LOUISE PARKER. ISABELLA comes marching gaily in, dressed in her out-door clothes. LOUISE is tall, graceful, affected, beautifully dressed and twenty-nine.*]

ISABELLA.

[*Speaking as she enters.*] Here's Louise! [*She stops petrified, as she sees ROBIN and MAGGIE sitting in a sentimental attitude on the settee.*] Oh!

[ROBIN and MAGGIE, *very much embarrassed, jump up as they enter. LOUISE comes towards ROBIN, who goes towards her, holding out his hand.*]

ROBIN.

How d'you do, Miss— Miss——

LOUISE.

[*Languidly giving him her hand.*] Parker
—Louise Parker.

ROBIN.

I hope you've had a nice journey from—
from —

LOUISE.

Leamington.

[*There is a pause of embarrassment.*
ROBIN looks at MAGGIE and goes to
her.

MAGGIE.

[*Whispering to ROBIN.*] Hadn't you better
tell them we are engaged?

ROBIN.

Yes. [*Turning to ISABELLA and LOUISE
who look towards him as he speaks.*] Miss Cot-
trell has just consented to become my wife.

[*He takes MAGGIE's hand. Another long
pause of embarrassment. ISABELLA
and LOUISE look at each other in con-
sternation. ROBIN looks at MAGGIE.*

MAGGIE.

[*Going to ISABELLA.*] I know without you
telling me that you congratulate me. Thank
you very much! [*She shakes ISABELLA warmly*

by the hand. ISABELLA does not respond. She does nothing but submit to have her hand shaken. MAGGIE then turns to LOUISE and shakes her warmly by the hand.] Thank you very much. [LOUISE submits in the same manner as ISABELLA. MAGGIE turns to ROBIN.] I'll be off home now to tell the family the joyful news.

[She takes her basket from the table and goes to the window.]

ROBIN.

I'll come with you. [To ISABELLA and LOUISE.] You'll excuse me, I'm sure—under the circumstances. I shall be back to lunch. Come along, Maggie.

[ROBIN and MAGGIE go off. LOUISE looks after them, then at ISABELLA.]

ISABELLA.

[In great distress.] My poor Louise—what must we do?

LOUISE.

We must lay our heads together, dear, and see if we can't wean him away from her.

[She unfastens her coat as the curtain falls.]

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—ROBIN WORTHINGTON'S drawing-room. *A large French window stands wide open and all the windows afford a view of ROBIN'S garden; a different view from that seen from his study window. The fireplace is banked up with ferns and flowering plants. There are plenty of comfortable armchairs, a cushion seat and two settees. Against the wall a cabinet. Up by the window a good-sized oval table is laid with a white cloth and tea-things for eight people. Chairs around this table.*

Three weeks have passed by since the first act. It is half-past four on an afternoon in June.

HENRY and ISABELLA and LOUISE PARKER are in the room. HENRY is looking off from the window. ISABELLA is seated on one sofa and LOUISE on the other. HENRY wears tennis flannels, and ISABELLA and LOUISE are charmingly dressed for a garden party.

Laughter and noise are heard off in the garden; the loud young voices of MAGGIE and DICKIE COTTRELL and BERTHA SIMS. The voice of BERTHA is then heard above the laughter.

BERTHA.

[*In the garden.*] Stop it, Dickie! Come on, Mag! Play!

[*The laughter and noise die away.*]

HENRY.

Robin's engagement really *has* rejuvenated him. There he is, running about the tennis court like a boy of fourteen, picking up balls for Maggie in the most gallant way. [*To ISABELLA.*] There's no doubt about it—he's tremendously in love with her.

LOUISE.

[*Languidly.*] He has only been engaged to her for three weeks yet. [HENRY *looks at LOUISE with marked disapproval.* ISABELLA *merely looks resigned and bored.* LOUISE *goes towards the window, saying graciously to ISABELLA as she passes her.*] I'm going out to talk to Lady Cottrell. [*She goes out.*]

HENRY.

[*Indignantly.*] However much longer does that woman intend to stay?

ISABELLA.

[*Resigned.*] I wish I knew.

HENRY.

It's monstrous! Lingered on week after week, uninvited—making up to Robin in this extraordinary fashion.

ISABELLA.

Louise has not improved since she left school.

HENRY.

The way she manoeuvres to get him alone, insists upon reading everything he writes, and is always trying to give the conversation an intellectual turn.

ISABELLA.

[*Letting herself go in irritation against LOUISE.*] Oh, yes—and the way she keeps coming down-stairs in one elaborate gown after another, gliding about so gracefully—and he takes no notice of her.

HENRY.

A good thing for *us* that he doesn't see what she's up to—since she's *our* friend.

ISABELLA.

[*Meekly.*] Mine, dear.

HENRY.

[*Stamping about.*] What is her object in it all? Does she think she'll get Robin away from Maggie?

ISABELLA.

That was what she said she meant to do when she first came. But, as you know, dear, I soon let her see I couldn't countenance anything of that sort. It's one thing to try and make a match, but it's quite another thing to try and break off an engagement.

HENRY.

Doesn't she see that?

ISABELLA.

When a woman doesn't wish to see a thing she has very little difficulty in persuading herself that it is not so. I can quite understand that it *was* very disappointing for Louise to come all the way from Leamington for nothing—but it wasn't *my* fault that Robin got engaged just before she arrived.

HENRY.

He probably wouldn't have taken any notice of her anyway.

ISABELLA.

That's what I told her to try and console her.

HENRY.

What troubles me most is that it looks so bad for *you* for her to be staying here so long and

behaving in this way. It looks as though you encouraged her.

ISABELLA.

I know. It presents *me* as a most repulsive character. But what can I do? She simply won't go.

HENRY.

You've given her some good strong hints, haven't you?

ISABELLA.

Dozens!

HENRY.

What does she say?

ISABELLA.

She doesn't say anything. She just stays. It looks as if she meant to stay forever.

HENRY.

I'm afraid you'll have to be rude to her.

ISABELLA.

I've been ruder to her already than I ever was to any one in my life.

HENRY.

I don't see how any one else can say anything to her. *You* invited her.

ISABELLA.

[*Troubled.*] Don't reproach me, darling. You don't know how I regret writing that letter.

HENRY.

[*Going towards her to comfort her.*] I'm not reproaching you, dear.

ISABELLA.

I can't help feeling you are displeased with me. [*She begins to cry.*]

HENRY.

No, dear.

ISABELLA.

I'm afraid you are—but you know, Henry—
[*she swallows her tears and looks up at HENRY*]
I do love you and baby. [*They embrace.*]

[*Enter LOUISE and LADY COTTRELL.*]

LADY COTTRELL is a strong, alert, opinionative woman of fifty; her clothes are loose and comfortable without being eccentric.

LOUISE.

Lady Cottrell and I have come in to see if tea is ready.

HENRY.

I suppose we must wait for Robin.

LADY COTTRELL.

Not at all. Ring the bell. [*She sits on the sofa. ISABELLA obediently rings the bell.*] He's forgotten all about us. He thinks only of Maggie. [*Addressing ISABELLA.*] Have you heard? We are going to have the wedding quite soon.

ISABELLA.

[*Interested.*] Oh—no—I hadn't heard.

HENRY.

Nor had I. When is it to be?

LADY COTTRELL.

In six weeks.

[*LOUISE places her hand to her heart.*

LADY COTTRELL *stares at her without betraying emotion of any kind.*

HENRY *and ISABELLA exchange glances.* LOUISE *totters towards ISABELLA.*

LOUISE.

[*To ISABELLA.*] Have you got your vinaigrette about you?

ISABELLA.

[*Irritably detaching a vinaigrette from the long chain which she wears round her neck.*] There!

LOUISE.

Thank you, dear. [*She sniffs the vinaigrette as ISABELLA glances at her with the utmost disapproval. LOUISE smiles wanly at LADY COTTRELL.*] I felt a little faint.

LADY COTTRELL.

Your dress is too tight. [*HENRY giggles. LOUISE glances haughtily at LADY COTTRELL, turns from her as if not deigning to reply, as she sniffs the vinaigrette, and sits down. LADY COTTRELL addresses ISABELLA.*] That's the cause of nearly all the fainting—tight-lacing. [*She pulls her dress away from her in front to show that she is not tightly laced.*] I don't faint! It's the cause of a great deal of bad temper, too—not to mention biliousness—Yes. In six weeks. August the tenth. Why should we wait? Nothing to wait for except the clothes.

LOUISE.

Do you think it's wise, dear Lady Cottrell, to let your girl be married so young?

ISABELLA.

[*Angrily under her breath.*] Louise!

LADY COTTRELL.

Wise! Of course I think it's wise or I shouldn't let her do it.

LOUISE.

It seems to me to be thrusting responsibilities upon her almost *too* early. [*With a rapid, affectedly impulsive movement, she darts to the cushion seat and drops gracefully upon it almost at LADY COTTRELL'S feet.*] *Do* let her remain a child a little longer.

[ISABELLA looks at HENRY, who shrugs his shoulders.

LADY COTTRELL.

Every girl ought to be married by the time she's twenty. *I* was—so were my two sisters; so was my eldest daughter, and so shall Maggie be. Marriage comes natural to a girl at that age. She loves her husband and obeys him instead of sitting up and criticizing him as they do if they haven't acquired the wifely habit in good time—the good old habit of subjection. It's all due to this present craze for late marriages that we have so many hysterical spinsters. *They* don't know what's the matter with them, but their mothers do. Nothing infuriates me more than the way our modern young women spend the time when they

ought to be having children, in thinking and reading and writing and talking about marriage; deciding among themselves what *men* ought to be like. By the time they think they are ready to put on their orange blossoms, they've grown so exacting they can't settle down to one man. Maggie shall marry in good time. [*Enter GLADYS with the tea, and plate of hot buns which she places on the oval table up stage.*] Tea! [*Cheerfully.*] I feel about ready for it after that harangue.

[*Goes up to inspect the tea table.* GLADYS goes out. HENRY joins LADY COTTRELL at the tea table. LOUISE remains drooping upon the cushion-seat the picture of despair. ISABELLA goes towards the window, passing between LOUISE and the sofa.

ISABELLA.

[*As she passes LOUISE.*] Get up!

LOUISE.

[*Slowly rising to her full height and saying tragically to herself.*] August the tenth!

[*She presses her hand to her temples.*

ISABELLA.

[*At the window.*] They've finished their game.

HENRY.

Are they coming in ?

ISABELLA.

Yes. Racing to see who'll get here first.
Bertha Sims is last.

LADY COTTRELL.

Who's first ?

ISABELLA.

Your son.

[Enter DICKIE COTTRELL carrying a racquet. He is a bright-faced, merry boy of eighteen. He wears tennis flannels. He enters running.]

DICKIE.

Here we are ! *[DICKIE runs in, then turning to look at the others who are following.]* Come along, Mr. Worthington !

[ROBIN and MAGGIE enter, hand in hand, running. ROBIN is rather blown.]

MAGGIE.

I'd have won if you hadn't held me back.

ROBIN.

[*Protesting.*] I can run as fast as any of *you*.

DICKIE.

Are you out of breath, Mr. Worthington?

ROBIN.

[*Who obviously is out of breath.*] No, of course I'm not out of breath.

MAGGIE.

Shall we all sprint back to the tennis lawn and back again?

ROBIN.

[*Very positively.*] No! Certainly not!

DICKIE.

[*Dancing up stage and looking off in the direction they have come.*] Here comes Bertha! Go it, Bertha! Run, Bertha!

[*He claps his hands.*]

MAGGIE.

[*Clapping her hands and dancing about with DICKIE, screaming.*] Bertha! Bertha! Bertha!

[*Enter BERTHA SIMS. BERTHA is a fat girl of sixteen. She is puffing and blowing as she runs in.*]

BERTHA.

I didn't get a fair start.

ROBIN.

[*Laughing.*] Poor Bertha!

DICKIE.

Good old Bertha!

[*He slaps BERTHA soundly on the back.*]

BERTHA.

Don't!

LADY COTTRELL.

Dickie! You mustn't do such things as that.

[*DICKIE is momentarily subdued.*]

MAGGIE.

[*Dancing up to the tea table.*] Come on, come on, come on. Tea!

[*She seats herself at the tea table.*]

ROBIN.

Come on, Dickie. We'll have tea at the big table.

DICKIE.

[*Making ROBIN pass in front of him.*] You must sit beside your inamorata.

ROBIN.

[*Going to the seat by MAGGIE, he says before he sits.*] Come along, Bertha.

BERTHA.

Where shall *I* sit?

ROBIN.

Anywhere.

[ROBIN and MAGGIE pour out the tea together.]

DICKIE.

Don't make a fuss, Bertha. It doesn't matter in the least where *you* sit.

[BERTHA sits down.]

LADY COTTRELL.

[To LOUISE.] I think we may as well let the gentlemen wait upon us, don't you, Miss Parker?

LOUISE.

August the tenth, did you say?

LADY COTTRELL.

Yes; I suppose you'll have gone away by then?

LOUISE.

[*Mysteriously.*] I don't know.

[*There is some general chattering and laughter at the tea table.*]

HENRY.

May I give you some tea, Lady Cottrell?

LADY COTTRELL.

Thank you.

[She takes a cup of tea from HENRY.]

HENRY.

[Giving another cup to LOUISE.] Tea?

LOUISE.

Thanks.

LADY COTTRELL.

[Calling out.] Dickie! Bring Miss Parker and me some buns.*[Shrieks of laughter come from the tea table. They all look towards it.]*

ROBIN.

[Rising and scarcely able to speak for laughter.] Bertha—has just stuck her thumb in the strawberry jam.*[He sits down shaking with laughter. All the others laugh, too, except LOUISE.]**BERTHA, sucking her left thumb, laughs round at them all, delighted with herself.*

LADY COTTRELL.

[Turning to LOUISE says, laughing.] Bertha has just stuck her thumb in the strawberry jam.*[LOUISE doesn't laugh.]*

DICKIE.

Oh, Bertha, you are a disgusting girl!

MAGGIE.

Sit down!

[She throws a piece of food at DICKIE. They all laugh and chatter round the table.]

LADY COTTRELL.

[To LOUISE.] How delightful it is to see Mr. Worthington unbend with the young people! No one would think, to look at him now, that he's a clever man.

[LADY COTTRELL and LOUISE turn to look at ROBIN, who is whispering with MAGGIE, his face nearly under the brim of her hat. LOUISE rises hastily, and goes up towards the window.]

ISABELLA.

[Anxiously to HENRY.] What is Louise up to now?

LOUISE.

[Calling.] Mr. Worthington. *[ROBIN is so engrossed in MAGGIE he doesn't hear LOUISE. She calls louder.]* Mr. Worthington!

ROBIN.

[*Turning to LOUISE.*] Yes ?

LOUISE.

Do come here. I want to show you something.

ROBIN.

[*To MAGGIE.*] Excuse me a minute.

[*He joins LOUISE.*]

LOUISE.

[*Affectedly, indicating the view from the window.*] Aren't the various lights and shadows in the garden lovely ?

ROBIN.

Lovely !

[*He hurries back to his seat beside MAGGIE.*]

LOUISE.

[*Gazing across the garden.*] They remind me of Bruges.

[*She looks round and finds him gone, then she gets a book and sits down.*]

ISABELLA.

[*To HENRY.*] Trying to make out she's so travelled.

BERTHA.

I say, can any of you do this?

[*She throws a lump of sugar in the air and tries to catch it in her mouth, but fails.*]

MAGGIE.

Yes. [*She throws a piece of food at BERTHA.*]

BERTHA.

Pig!

[*She throws a piece of food back at MAGGIE. MAGGIE throws a bun at BERTHA. LADY COTTRELL laughs heartily.*]

ROBIN.

Can you do this?

[*Juggling with some lumps of sugar.*]

MAGGIE.

[*Taking lumps of sugar from the sugar-basin.*]

Oh! I must try that. One, two, three!

[*Juggling with them.*]

DICKIE.

[*Also juggling with lumps of sugar.*] One, two, three!—Don't jog me.

BERTHA.

Look! [*She tries to balance her teaspoon on her nose.*]

[*Enter MISS HESELTINE with a type-written letter in her hand. She remains near the door, a little timid among all the noise and laughter which seems to greet her. They subside when she enters, and all look towards her. ROBIN comes down to MISS HESELTINE.*

ROBIN.

What is it, Miss Heseltine?

MISS HESELTINE.

You asked me to bring you this letter as soon as it was written.

ROBIN.

Oh, yes. [*Taking the letter from MISS HESELTINE he reads it over to himself.*] That seems all right. [*He looks at MISS HESELTINE and says kindly.*] You look tired. You'd better leave off for to-day and go home.

MISS HESELTINE. .

I haven't finished typing the American article.

ROBIN.

Won't it do to-morrow?

MISS HESELTINE.

You promised to send it off to-night.

ROBIN.

But I don't want you to overwork yourself.

MISS HESELTINE.

If I didn't overwork myself—I might lose my head, too.

[She takes the letter out of his hand and goes out quickly with it. ROBIN looks after her till she has closed the door. LOUISE comes towards him, smiling, with a small volume in her hand.]

LOUISE.

Mr. Worthington, have you read this new volume of Eastern Poems?

ROBIN.

[Preoccupied.] Yes.

LOUISE.

Do you think we are meant to take them literally or allegorically?

ROBIN.

Both.

[He passes LOUISE and sits on the cushion seat, taking out his cigarette case and helping himself to a cigarette, while LOUISE sits on the settee and peruses the volume of Eastern Poems.]

DICKIE.

[*Coming to* ROBIN.] Shall we go and play some more tennis?

ROBIN.

Not yet.

DICKIE.

Why not? What are we waiting for?

ROBIN.

Digestion.

DICKIE.

You don't need to digest a cup of tea and a handful of buns.

ROBIN.

You don't. *I* do.

DICKIE.

Mag!

MAGGIE.

Yes?

DICKIE.

Make him come and play tennis. He's slacking.

MAGGIE.

[*Coming to* ROBIN.] Don't make him play if he doesn't want to. [*Kindly to* ROBIN.] *I'll* go and play with them while *you* have your snooze.

ROBIN.

[*Jumping up as if he had been shot.*] Snooze!
I don't want a snooze! [*Gaily.*] Who's coming to play tennis?

BERTHA.

[*Still eating a bun.*] I'm ready.

MAGGIE.

Come along then.

[*MAGGIE goes into the garden, running.*]

BERTHA.

Wait a tick.

[*Exit BERTHA, running and eating.*]

DICKIE.

Come along, Mr. Worthington.

[*Exit DICKIE running.*]

HENRY.

I say, Robin, you'd much better not play again immediately.

ROBIN.

Why? *They* do.

HENRY.

They are a generation younger than *you*.

ROBIN.

I wish everybody wouldn't treat me as if I were an old gentleman.

[*He goes out after them.*]

LADY COTTRELL.

I declare, Captain Worthington, your brother is the youngest of the party.

HENRY.

He'll pay for it to-morrow. He'll be so stiff he won't be able to walk.

LADY COTTRELL.

After a few sets of tennis? He's not as old as all that.

HENRY

It's not the tennis that's going to find him out. It's all that idiotic ragging and jumping about and screaming. It's not natural at his time of life. A man of such sedentary habits, too.

ISABELLA.

If he's not very careful he'll break one of his ligaments.

LOUISE.

It's so bad for him *intellectually* to mix with such *very* young people. A man of *his* ability ought not to have been so much amused when Miss Sims stuck her thumb in the strawberry jam.

LADY COTTRELL.

I was exceedingly amused. It was a thoroughly characteristic example of British wit and humour.

[*She goes out.* ISABELLA *glances at* LOUISE *who is again absorbed in the Eastern Poems before she says to* HENRY *in an undertone.*

ISABELLA.

I consider the way Louise behaved all through tea was nothing short of scandalous.

HENRY.

You'll really have to say something to her. You'd better take this opportunity.

[*Exit* HENRY.]

ISABELLA.

Louise—I'm ashamed of you!

LOUISE.

[*In mild surprise.*] Why?

ISABELLA.

Everybody must have noticed.

LOUISE.

What?

ISABELLA.

The way you run after Robin. [LOUISE *looks affronted.*] Your attempts to wean him away from Maggie—[*with a reproving smile as LOUISE is about to retort*] your own words, dear. [LOUISE *hangs her head.*] And it's not only to-day, it's all the time. I don't know what Lady Cottrell must think.

LOUISE.

[*Retorting.*] I am only treating Mr. Worthington as I treat every man.

ISABELLA.

I hope *not*.

LOUISE.

I mean to say—I'm amazed you should see anything to criticize in my behaviour. I am sure *no one*—except *you* who know why you invited me and are therefore, I suppose, on the lookout for *motives* in everything I do—no one else could say otherwise than that I treat Mr. Worthington in a perfectly easy and friendly manner.

ISABELLA.

It was the same thing at school.

LOUISE.

I don't know what you mean.

ISABELLA.

You can't have forgotten the young man with the bicycle who lived opposite !

LOUISE.

[*Angry.*] I wasn't the only one. You and Jinny and Margaret were just as bad.

ISABELLA.

There ! *That* is an illustration of what I mean. *You* think *we* were as bad as *you*.

LOUISE.

You *were*.

ISABELLA.

We were all just as madly in love with him, but we none of us went the lengths *you* did. *We* only smiled at him and waved our pocket handkerchiefs. *You* used to write him letters and threw nosegays at him out of your bedroom window—till he got in such a fright he told his mother and *she* complained, and *you* were expelled.

LOUISE.

[*Crestfallen.*] I don't see why you need rake that up now.

ISABELLA.

I only remind you of it because you are still doing exactly the same sort of thing.

LOUISE.

When have I ever written a letter to Mr. Worthington? When have I thrown a single nosegay at him?

ISABELLA.

You've got beyond *that* I should *hope*. What I mean to say is—here you are again, making the boldest advances—without apparently realizing that you are doing anything out of the ordinary.

LOUISE.

[*Childishly.*] I'm very much hurt that you should think such things about me. You've made me feel horrid.

ISABELLA.

Let me give you a word of advice, Louise.

LOUISE.

Well, what is it?

ISABELLA.

It's not the way to succeed in love to be so persevering.

LOUISE.

[*Sitting on the floor at ISABELLA'S feet in the attitude of one willing to learn.*] What do you think would be a better way?

ISABELLA.

Be more reticent. If you don't encourage a man too much *he* will make advances.

LOUISE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Not always.

ISABELLA.

You must show him now and then that you like him.

LOUISE.

Of course.

ISABELLA.

But don't show him too often. Otherwise he takes fright or gets bored—or says to himself, "I can have *her* any time," and takes no trouble, so nothing comes of it.

LOUISE.

That's so true!

ISABELLA.

[*Warming to her subject.*] Baffle them a bit. Then they begin to wonder about you till their heads become so full of you they can think of nothing else. That's love. [*As she meets LOUISE'S earnest and inquiring gaze she stops short.*] Oh! [*Uneasily.*] I hope you don't think I am giving you hints as to how to succeed with—any one in particular?

LOUISE.

Oh, no, dear. We were speaking quite impersonally.

ISABELLA.

I can't think how I allowed myself to be led away into considering the best ways to attract men except that the subject is so engrossing. But that's not what we are talking about. I'll have nothing to do with helping you to wean Robin away from Maggie. I've told you so repeatedly. I don't think you ought to be here.

LOUISE.

Whenever I propose leaving, *Mr. Worthington* invariably asks me to stay on.

ISABELLA.

Mere politeness.

LOUISE.

I couldn't very well leave by the next train because I found on my arrival that *Mr. Worthington* was engaged.

ISABELLA.

I never suggested you should leave by the next train. The right and proper thing for you to have done was to have stayed here for two or three days, and then had an engagement elsewhere.

LOUISE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] I *had* thought of leaving to-morrow.

ISABELLA.

That's right.

LOUISE.

But I have just heard that the wedding day is fixed for August the tenth. It'll look very funny if I leave now.

ISABELLA.

It'll look much funnier if you don't.

LOUISE.

Every one would say, "Miss Parker stayed until the wedding day was fixed, then, seeing she had no chance, she left." Oh, no—I can't leave now. It would be putting myself in a very false position.

ISABELLA.

You *can't* hang on like this! [*Marching towards LOUISE and saying with great determination.*] You really must go—please, dear.

LOUISE.

[*Calmly and seriously.*] And do you sincerely believe, Isabella, that Maggie Cottrell will make *him* happy?

ISABELLA.

That's nobody's business but *his*. He has chosen her. He is engaged to her, and he is going to be married to her in six weeks.

LOUISE.

[*Moving about, as she says, dramatically.*] It must be stopped! Why can't *you* do something? Why doesn't your husband interfere? He ought to *save* his brother. Poor Mr. Worthington is out of his mind. He's infatuated, bewitched. He'll be bored to death in no time by that wretched chit of a child.

ISABELLA.

[*Quite unimpressed by LOUISE's exhibition of feeling.*] When are you going to leave?

LOUISE.

[*Deliberately.*] I haven't made up my mind.

ISABELLA.

I shall tell Henry. [*Enter ROBIN quickly.*

ROBIN.

[*Indignantly.*] What do you think? They've got tired of playing tennis, and now they want to play hide-and-seek all over the garden! I won't do it. [ISABELLA *laughs*.

LOUISE.

[*Smiling at ROBIN.*] Poor Mr. Worthington! We'll protect you.

ROBIN.

[*Still speaking indignantly.*] I can't keep this up. I've been on the go ever since three o'clock. [*He sits.*] The more they run about the livelier they get, but *I* don't. [*Enter MAGGIE. ROBIN does not see her, as his back is towards her. MAGGIE puts her finger to her lips as a sign to ISABELLA and LOUISE not to let ROBIN know she is there. She advances towards ROBIN smiling, and on tip-toe, then suddenly puts her hands over his eyes and laughs. ROBIN, taken by surprise, is exceedingly annoyed, struggles, and says, crossly.*] Don't do that. Who is it? [*He frees himself, rises, and seeing MAGGIE softens.*] Oh! Maggie, is it you? [*He takes her hand and says kindly.*] I'm sorry I spoke crossly—but you know, my dear—I think you are getting a little old to do that sort of thing.

MAGGIE.

[*Sweetly.*] You said the other day that the way I play and run about is one of my chief charms in your eyes.

ROBIN.

I like you to be playful prettily.

[*He talks apart with MAGGIE.*

ISABELLA.

[*To LOUISE as she goes towards the door.*] Come along, Louise. I don't think we are wanted here. [*She waits for LOUISE.*

LOUISE.

[*Rising reluctantly, glances at ROBIN and MAGGIE, and then joins ISABELLA.*] He is beginning to get bored with her. I shall certainly not leave yet.

[*ISABELLA and LOUISE go out.*

MAGGIE.

Shall we go out?

ROBIN.

Presently.

MAGGIE.

It's a sin to stick in the house on a day like this. [*ROBIN invites her in smiling dumb show to come and sit beside him on the sofa. She comes towards him as she says.*] Very well. We'll sit here just five minutes.

[*She springs on to the sofa beside him and nestles close up to him. He puts his arm round her.*

ROBIN.

This is the nicest part of the whole day.

MAGGIE.

I love playing hide-and-seek.

ROBIN.

I love having you all to myself.

[MAGGIE *smiles up in his face, then gives his nose a little playful pinch. He kisses her hand.*]

MAGGIE.

[*Counting the buttons down his coat with her forefinger.*] One, two, three, four. I feel terribly kiddish to-day. Some days—when it's fine and bright like this—I just want to run about very fast all the time like a field-mouse.

ROBIN.

Don't you ever want to sit still and bask like a lizard?

MAGGIE.

Oh, no, never—at least—not for long at a time. I always want to be up and doing. I feel as if I could dance and sing the minute I get up in the morning.

ROBIN.

I can't bear being active before breakfast!

MAGGIE.

Can't you? *I can.* [*He puts his arm further round her to draw her closer to him.*] Wait a minute. That's not comfortable. [*She sits up and shakes herself, then leans her back against his shoulder, in a most unromantic position.*] There! That's better! [*She lets her head fall back on his shoulder, which places him in a most uncomfortable position.*] I could go to sleep like this.

ROBIN.

I couldn't.

[*Enter GLADYS to clear away the tea-things followed by MRS. HIGSON. MRS. HIGSON is the housekeeper; a middle aged respectable looking woman. MAGGIE sits up and then goes to the window.*]

MAGGIE.

She's come to clear away. We'd better go out.

ROBIN.

[*Also rising.*] She'll have finished in a minute. [*To MRS. HIGSON.*] We've made rather a mess there, haven't we, Mrs. Higson?

[*Takes a cigarette.*]

MRS. HIGSON.

What does that matter, sir, so long as you enjoyed yourselves?

ROBIN.

After all—one is only middle-aged once.

MAGGIE.

I *should* enjoy a good game of hide-and-seek.

[ROBIN takes out his match-box and strikes a match. MAGGIE runs quickly towards him and blows out his match.]

ROBIN.

[*Taken by surprise, is annoyed.*] Oh, don't—please. What a silly thing to do.

MAGGIE.

[*Laughs.*] All right. I won't do it again. [*Having gathered up everything* MRS. HIGSON goes out. ROBIN strikes a second match and while he is doing so MAGGIE snatches the cigarette out of his mouth and runs away with it, saying gaily.] I didn't say I wouldn't do that. I love playing tricks on people. [GLADYS follows MRS. HIGSON off with the tea-cloth and cake-stand. ROBIN sits on the settee looking very solemn.] You aren't cross, are you?

ROBIN.

No, dear, but you know—sometimes—you are just a little bit rough.

[MAGGIE crosses to him and kisses him on the cheek very nicely and gently, then steps back. He smiles at her quite won over.]

MAGGIE.

Shall we go out now?

ROBIN.

Soon. [*Leans towards her.*] Sit down and have a little talk first.

[MAGGIE, showing no inclination to be cuddlesome, sits on the cushion seat.]

MAGGIE.

What do you want to talk about?

ROBIN.

[*Smiling.*] August the tenth.

MAGGIE.

We talked about that this morning.

ROBIN.

[*Wistfully.*] Do you remember that evening when we sat in this room for a long time, holding each other's hands and hardly saying a word?

MAGGIE.

[*Cheerfully.*] We *were* two sleepy things. We'd been out in the air all day.

ROBIN.

It was such a happy, restful evening.

MAGGIE.

Wasn't it—but when I'm feeling really strong there's nothing I like so well as to dance till midnight and end up with a good pillow fight.

ROBIN.

[*Slowly and thoughtfully.*] There is a great difference—in our ages.

[*Enter MISS HESELTINE. She carries a number of loose typewritten pages in her hand.*

MAGGIE.

Hullo, Miss Heseltine.

ROBIN.

[*To MISS HESELTINE.*] Do you want *me* for anything?

MISS HESELTINE.

I can come later on, if it's inconvenient now.

ROBIN.

If you wouldn't mind.

MAGGIE.

[*Springing up.*] No. This is business. [*To MISS HESELTINE.*] You told me I must never interfere with his business. I'll go out and play with Dickie and Bertha. I don't mind.

[*She pats ROBIN'S arm and goes off to the garden skippingly—and calling "Dickie."*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Referring to the pages in her hand.*] There seems to be something wrong with this.

ROBIN.

[*Takes pages.*] Is that the American article?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes. I wouldn't have disturbed you with it now, only it must go to-night.

ROBIN.

What's wrong with it?

MISS HESELTINE.

You've written parts of it in the first person singular and other parts in the first person plural.

ROBIN.

Not really?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes.

ROBIN.

[*Glancing down the sheets.*] So I have. How did I come to make such a mistake as that?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Primly.*] You must have had your head full of something else.

ROBIN.

[*Turning over the sheets.*] Like when I wrote that article the other day and called beer rice.

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes. And in the last chapter of the new novel you called several of the characters by the wrong names.

ROBIN.

[*Looking at her before saying, gravely.*] Has *all* my work been careless lately?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes, very.

ROBIN.

Sit down, won't you, while I look over this. [MISS HESELTINE *sits.*] It means going over the whole thing carefully from beginning to end, and I *am* so tired! [*Turning over a page or two.*] I can't do any good with it till I've had at least an hour's rest.

MISS HESELTINE.

That throws it so late. It has to be typed after *you've* been through it.

ROBIN.

[*Sighing.*] Oh, dear, then I suppose I must, but you know—it's not so much that I'm tired physically. It's my brain—it's completely disorganized. I can't concentrate.

MISS HESELTINE.

I think *I* could make the necessary changes if you'd trust it to me. [*She comes towards him.*] I could take it home to do and bring it back to you this evening.

ROBIN.

Why take it home? Why can't you do it here?

MISS HESELTINE.

There's too much noise in the garden.

ROBIN.

[*With a weary little smile.*] It isn't like our usual quiet afternoons, is it?

MISS HESELTINE.

No, it isn't—not at all.

ROBIN.

It won't be like this much longer. When I'm married and we've settled down—you and I will be able to work together peacefully again—as we used to do. Shan't we?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Taking the pages from him.*] I'm afraid not.

ROBIN.

Why not?

MISS HESELTINE.

Because when you are married—I shan't be here.

ROBIN.

[*Surprised.*] What do you mean? You won't be here?

MISS HESELTINE.

I'm leaving Farnham.

ROBIN.

Leaving?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes.

ROBIN.

Where are you going?

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't know quite. I think I shall go and live in London.

ROBIN.

That's not far away. You can still come and work for *me*—can't you?

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't think so. [*Moves as if to go.*]

ROBIN.

Wait a minute. I want to know about this.

MISS HESELTINE.

That's all. I find I must leave.

ROBIN.

[*Going towards her.*] People don't usually leave without giving a reason. [MISS HESELTINE *hesitates.*] I think you owe me some explanation.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Looking at the pages in her hand.*] I must go and do this now.

ROBIN.

[*Taking her by the arm.*] Sit down and tell me why you want to leave me.

[MISS HESELTINE *reluctantly sits again.*
He watches her all the time, standing.]

MISS HESELTINE.

There's no particular reason—that I can give you.

ROBIN.

What do you intend to do after you leave here?

MISS HESELTINE.

That hasn't been definitely decided yet.

ROBIN.

Then why need you go? [MISS HESELTINE looks on the ground.] I don't want to be too inquisitive, but it's so extraordinary that you can't give me any reason.

MISS HESELTINE.

I need a change.

ROBIN.

If it's a holiday you want ——

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Interrupting him.*] Oh, no, thank you. I don't want a holiday. I had three weeks in April.

ROBIN.

And you'll be having another three or four weeks quite soon—when I go away on my honeymoon.

MISS HESELTINE.

I shall have left before that.

ROBIN.

I had no idea you were dissatisfied. [MISS HESELTINE *makes a restless, nervous movement.*] If it's a question of earning more money—I shall be very happy to meet you in any way I can.

MISS HESELTINE.

It's not that. Please don't think it's that. I'm more than satisfied with what you give me.

ROBIN.

Are you going to be married?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Almost angrily.*] Of course not!
[*She turns away from him in her seat.*]

ROBIN.

Then what is it? [*With a ring of genuine distress in his voice as he sits on the ottoman at her feet.*] Why—why go away and leave me?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Distressed by his distress, is greatly agitated.*] I *must*. I'm very sorry—but I *must*!

ROBIN.

But I can't think what I shall do without you. I shan't be able to get on at all. I can hardly

imagine yet what it's going to be like here without *you*. I've never thought of you leaving me. You've been coming to me every day for such a long time—five years—it's a long time. [MISS HESELTINE, *unable to control her agitation, rises. He rises almost at the same time as he says.*] Don't decide yet—not just yet.

MISS HESELTINE.

I can't stay. It's no use pretending I can. I can't! I can't do it!

ROBIN.

[*Puzzled.*] Are you afraid your position here is going to be made difficult after my marriage? [*A pause for her to reply.*] Is that it? [*Another pause as before.*] I don't see why it need be difficult. Maggie is very good about not disturbing me in my work hours. She won't interfere with *you*. [*Making light of it.*] If that's all it is — [MISS HESELTINE *bursts into tears. ROBIN is very much distressed to see her in tears and goes to her.*] Miss Heseltine! What's the matter? I can't bear to see you like this. What is it? Is it something *I've* done? Have I hurt you without knowing it? [*Putting his hands on her shoulders and turning her towards him.*] Miss Heseltine! Look at me!—tell me! why must you leave me?

[*He gently pulls her hands away from her face ; she looks up at him appealingly, unable to hide her love for him. He understands and stands looking at her transfixed.*

MAGGIE.

[*From the garden.*] Robin ! What are you doing ?

DICKIE.

[*Also from the garden.*] Where is he ?

MAGGIE.

In here. [*When their voices are heard, ROBIN steps back from MISS HESELTINE. She makes an undecided step or two as if she didn't know where to go, then begins nervously gathering up the pages. Enter MAGGIE followed by DICKIE and BERTHA SIMS, all darting about and skipping. MAGGIE, speaking as she enters and coming towards ROBIN.*] We want to wind up with something really silly before we go home.

ROBIN.

[*Protesting.*] Oh, no—my dears—no !

DICKIE AND BERTHA.

Yes, yes.

BERTHA.

[*Beginning to dance and sing by herself.*]
Here we go round the mulberry bush.

DICKIE.

[*Singing.*] The mulberry bush.

MAGGIE.

[*Joining in as well.*] The mulberry bush !

[*They all laugh.*

[*While this is going on* MISS HESELTINE, *with the pages in her hand, slowly goes out.*

[*LOUISE comes in from the garden. Taking in the situation, she says, "Mr. Worthington, too!" and seizing him by both hands dances him round. He is then swept into the ring between DICKIE and MAGGIE. LOUISE tries to enter the ring, first on ROBIN'S left, in which attempt she fails, and then on his right, this time achieving success. They all laugh and dance in a ring as curtain falls.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*The same as the first act. The scene is arranged as before except that the cradle is no longer there. It is beginning to grow dusk. ROBIN, dressed as at the end of the second act, is standing, with his hands in his pockets, staring at MISS HESELTINE'S desk.*

ROBIN.

[Slowly and thoughtfully, as if scarcely able to credit what he says.] Miss Heseltine!

[LOUISE enters. She wears an elaborate dinner gown.

LOUISE.

[In the doorway.] May I come in?

ROBIN.

[Suddenly brought to himself.] Is it as late as that?

LOUISE.

I dressed early. I mistook the time. The drawing-room was deserted, so I thought I'd come in here. I hope I don't intrude.

ROBIN.

[*Merely politely.*] Not at all.

LOUISE.

[*Smiling as if she had received a most pressing invitation to stay.*] Thank you! [*She closes the door and comes towards ROBIN.*] Has she gone?

ROBIN.

Yes.

LOUISE.

[*With a little sigh of satisfaction.*] Ah!

ROBIN.

She took her work home to do.

LOUISE.

Maggie?

ROBIN.

Miss Heseltine. Oh, yes; those children have all gone. Thank goodness! [*Hurriedly correcting himself.*] The dears.

LOUISE.

Weren't you rather glad—between ourselves—to see them go?

ROBIN.

I don't feel safe even yet. I can't help thinking that Bertha Sims is still lurking

among the bushes—ready to spring out at me. What's that noise? [*He goes to the window and looks out, then closes the curtains.*] Only the rooks going home.

[*He goes towards the electric switch.*]

LOUISE.

[*Sentimentally.*] The twilight hour. [*She leans back luxuriously and says languidly.*] How peaceful it is here! How perfectly harmonious! [*ROBIN turns on the electric light. This surprises and disconcerts LOUISE.*] Oh! [*She sits up. ROBIN takes out his cigarette case and helps himself to a cigarette. He is absorbed in his own thoughts, and does not notice LOUISE.*] Have you got a cigarette to give me?

ROBIN.

[*Offering her his cigarette case.*] I beg your pardon. My mind was full of something else.

LOUISE.

[*Smiles at him as she slowly draws a cigarette from the case.*] Thank you very much.

ROBIN.

[*After a moment's pause.*] Don't mention it. You want a light.

[*He moves away for the match-box, which is on the writing-table, brings it to*

LOUISE *and offers it to her. LOUISE smilingly makes a sign with her hands for him to strike a match. He does so. LOUISE does not offer to take the match, but lights her cigarette from it as he holds it.*

LOUISE.

Ta!

ROBIN.

I beg your pardon?

LOUISE.

Ta! [ROBIN *lights his own cigarette then throws the match in an ash-tray and sits on a settee at some distance from LOUISE.*] I hope you don't object to women smoking?

ROBIN.

I don't mind one way or the other.

LOUISE.

I was afraid you might think it unwomanly.

ROBIN.

I shouldn't like my wife to smoke.

LOUISE.

[*Rising.*] I practically *never* smoke. [*She puts her cigarette on an ash-tray.*]
[*Enter* GLADYS.

GLADYS.

[*Addressing* LOUISE.] If you please, miss, Mrs. Worthington sent me to say will you kindly come and talk to her while she dresses?

LOUISE.

[*Sweetly to* GLADYS.] Tell Mrs. Worthington I will come—presently.

GLADYS.

Thank you, miss.

[*Exit* GLADYS.

ROBIN.

If you want to go and talk to Isabella, don't mind *me*.

LOUISE.

[*Reproachfully.*] Do you *want* me to go?

ROBIN.

Oh, no—I didn't mean *that*—of course.

LOUISE.

[*Archly.*] Shall I stay?

ROBIN.

[*After a pause, reluctantly.*] Do.

LOUISE.

I know you wouldn't say that unless you meant it. [*She sits by him.*] You and I never seem to be left alone together—do we?

ROBIN.

[*Carelessly.*] Don't we?

LOUISE.

Never. And I always feel we should have so much to say to each other if we could once break through our British reserve. [*He looks at her in surprise. She smiles at him.*] You have drawn me to you by your writings. I am one of your most devoted readers. I buy all your books. Oftentimes—after reading one or other of your various masterpieces—I have turned from the contemplation of Robin Worthington, the author, to the contemplation of Robin Worthington the man.

ROBIN.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh, yes![*Enter GLADYS.*

GLADYS.

[*Addressing LOUISE.*] Mrs. Worthington says will you please come at once. It's most partickler.

ROBIN.

[*Attempting to rise.*] Don't let me detain you.

LOUISE.

[*Preventing ROBIN rising by laying her hand on his arm, as she turns to GLADYS and says impatiently.*] Say I am coming—presently.

GLADYS.

Yes, miss.

[*Exit GLADYS.*]

LOUISE.

[*Intensely.*] I want to see you take your place among the immortals. You *could* if you *would*. But you never *will*—until you have the right woman beside you—a woman of heart, brain, experience—a woman who has lived and suffered—one who would help you in your work, who would be capable of being at the same time your companion and your inspiration. [*She drops her intense tone and says, colloquially.*] Maggie Cottrell can't appreciate you.

ROBIN.

[*Rising abruptly, and annoyed.*] We won't discuss her, please.

LOUISE.

[*Reproachfully.*] You are angry with me.

ROBIN.

[*Turning to her.*] No, I'm not angry, but——

LOUISE.

[*Interrupting him by rising and saying frankly.*] Forgive me! [*She comes to him and extends both her hands. ROBIN reluctantly takes her hands.*]

[*Enter GLADYS.*

GLADYS.

Mrs. Worthington says——

LOUISE.

[*Losing her temper.*] Tell her I'm busy. [*Exit GLADYS. LOUISE plants herself in front of ROBIN and looks earnestly in his face.*] You do forgive me?

ROBIN.

[*Bored.*] Oh—yes, of course.

LOUISE.

Yes, but *really*.

ROBIN.

I must go and dress.

[He tries to get past her.]

LOUISE.

[Planting herself in front of him.] I ought not to have spoken as I did of Maggie Cottrell—but I can't bear to see you throwing yourself away.

ROBIN.

I shall be late.

[He makes another attempt to get past her.]

LOUISE.

[Preventing him getting away by laying her hand on his arm.] If only you were going to marry some woman worthy to be your wife!

ROBIN.

[Trying to free himself.] Yes, but I'm not—I mean I am.*[Enter ISABELLA, carrying her gloves, and then HENRY. ISABELLA wears a smart dinner-gown, and HENRY his evening clothes.]*

ISABELLA.

[Sharply as she enters.] Louise! I sent for you three times.

LOUISE.

[*Sweetly as she goes towards ISABELLA.*] I know you did, dear. Was it anything that mattered?

[*They talk together, ISABELLA obviously chiding LOUISE. ROBIN joins HENRY after beckoning him.*]

ROBIN.

[*Drawing HENRY aside.*] I'm so glad you came in. I was having *such* a time.

HENRY.

What's happened?

ROBIN.

I don't think I'm naturally the kind of fellow who thinks every woman is in love with him—but really—this afternoon! It must be my lucky day.

[*ISABELLA comes towards ROBIN when she speaks, while LOUISE sits by the fire.*]

ISABELLA.

Aren't you going to dress?

ROBIN.

Yes, I'll go now.

ISABELLA.

The cab will be here in about ten minutes.

ROBIN.

What cab?

ISABELLA.

To take us to the Hendersons'.

ROBIN.

[*Addressing HENRY and ISABELLA in turns during the next speech.*] Oh, dear me! yes. We promised to go and dine at the Hendersons'—didn't we? I'd forgotten all about it. I don't want to go a bit. I say, couldn't you three go without me?

HENRY.

I don't know, I'm sure.

ISABELLA.

What will Mrs. Henderson say?

ROBIN.

Tell her I had to stay and work. You don't mind, do you? I really need an evening to myself. I shall dine quietly in my study, and go to bed early. [*He takes his latch-key out of his pocket and gives it to HENRY.*] There's my latch-key. You don't mind, do you? Thanks so much; it's awfully kind of you.
[*He goes out.*]

ISABELLA.

How tiresome of him to back out! [To HENRY.] Have you got everything?

HENRY.

I think so.

ISABELLA.

Cigarettes?

HENRY.

[*Feeling his breast-pocket.*] Yes.

ISABELLA.

Watch?

HENRY.

[*Feeling his watch-pocket.*] Yes.

ISABELLA.

Pocket-handkerchief?

HENRY.

Yes—[*looks in sleeve and pocket*] no.

[*Exit* HENRY.]

LOUISE.

[*Pressing her hands to her temples, and calling out, as if in sudden pain.*] Oh—oh!

ISABELLA.

[*Anxiously.*] What's the matter?

LOUISE.

I've got such a splitting headache. It's as if some one were driving a nail right through my temple.

ISABELLA.

[*Coming towards LOUISE, much concerned.*]
I'm so sorry.

LOUISE.

I can't possibly go to the Hendersons'.

ISABELLA.

[*Immediately suspicious, she backs away.*]
Louise!

LOUISE.

You couldn't ask me to go to a dinner-party with my head in *this* state.

ISABELLA.

[*Drily.*] You'll feel better soon.

LOUISE.

Whenever I have a headache it always lasts all the evening.

ISABELLA.

We'll take some menthol with us.

LOUISE.

Think of driving in a closed cab!

ISABELLA.

We'll have it open.

LOUISE.

That would blow our hair about.

ISABELLA.

We'll take veils.

LOUISE.

It's no use, dear. I'm suffering too much ; I shouldn't enjoy myself.

ISABELLA.

[*Mercilessly.*] I don't *ask* that you should enjoy yourself. I ask that you should come with us.

LOUISE.

I really must stay at home.

ISABELLA.

Very well, then—we'll *all* stay at home.

[*She sits down facing LOUISE. LOUISE looks poutingly at ISABELLA a moment before she speaks.*]

LOUISE.

There's no dinner for you.

ISABELLA.

There's none for *you*, either.

LOUISE.

What is enough for one is generally enough for two—but it's not enough for four.

ISABELLA.

[*Muttering.*] I thought so.

LOUISE.

I have no intention of dining with Mr. Worthington. [*Rising in her queenliest manner.*] I shall ask Mrs. Higson to serve me a snack in my room.

ISABELLA.

[*Calmly, but firmly.*] I shall not go and leave you here, Louise.

LOUISE.

[*Reproachfully.*] You don't trust me.

[*Sits beside* ISABELLA.

ISABELLA.

[*In an ironically affectionate tone.*] Darling—you wrong me. I only meant—how could I sit through an elaborate dinner if I knew that my friend was suffering alone in her chamber?

LOUISE.

That's very sweet of you. But think of poor

Mr. and Mrs. Henderson. They will be *so* disappointed if you don't go.

ISABELLA.

[*Amiably.*] Henry must make my excuses.

LOUISE.

But if three out of four of their guests don't turn up!

ISABELLA.

[*Assuming gaiety and friendliness.*] They won't think much of themselves, will they? [LOUISE *looks away, looking cross.*] You and I will have a nice little mess of something all by ourselves upstairs. It'll be just like the dear old schooldays, when we used to have forbidden feasts in our bedrooms. [*She drops the gay and friendly tone, and says, drily.*] Is your head any better?

LOUISE.

[*Seeing that her present line is hopeless, takes a new one, and says solemnly.*] Isabella—Belle dear, I didn't tell you. I have made up my mind to leave to-morrow.

ISABELLA.

[*Unable to conceal her delight.*] Not really!

LOUISE.

[*Pained.*] I know you wish it.

ISABELLA.

[*Politely.*] Not on my own account.

LOUISE.

As I am leaving to-morrow, I should like to stay at home this evening.

ISABELLA.

[*Suspiciously.*] To say good-bye to Robin ?

LOUISE.

[*Coldly.*] To pack.

ISABELLA.

[*Eagerly.*] I'll help you with your packing.

LOUISE.

Thank you, dear ; but I never can pack if there's any one in the room.

ISABELLA.

I'll sit on the landing and be ready when you want me.

LOUISE.

[*Losing her temper and rising abruptly.*]
Don't be such a fool.

ISABELLA.

You needn't think I don't see through you.

LOUISE.

What d'you mean?

ISABELLA.

I don't believe you have the slightest intention of leaving to-morrow.

LOUISE.

Do you think I'm a liar?

ISABELLA.

[*Cheerfully.*] Yes.

LOUISE.

How dare you say such a thing?

ISABELLA.

As if I don't know what you are up to.

LOUISE.

[*Defiantly.*] What am I *up* to—as you term it?

ISABELLA.

Do you want me to tell you?

LOUISE.

[*Haughtily.*] Certainly.

ISABELLA.

As soon as Henry and I have left the house you'll rush upstairs and put on a tea-gown—the white one most likely, with the angel-sleeves—and then—when you have calculated that Robin will just about have begun his dinner—you'll come floating in. You won't have had any dinner. He'll feel obliged to ask you to share his. You'll refuse at first—if you think you stand any chance of being pressed—then you'll sit down. You will begin the conversation by telling him that Maggie doesn't appreciate him. That I believe is the usual opening with those who attempt to make discord between lovers ——

LOUISE.

[*Exploding with wrath.*] Isabella, you're a beast.

ISABELLA.

[*With great determination.*] You shan't stay here alone with Robin because I won't allow it.

LOUISE.

[*Changing her tactics, turns to ISABELLA and says calmly and seriously.*] He asked me to remain.

ISABELLA.

[*Staring at LOUISE in amazement.*] He asked you. . . .

LOUISE.

[*Going a little towards* ISABELLA.] Not in so many words—but saying he wants to be left alone is an invitation to me to stay.

ISABELLA.

[*Bursting out laughing.*] Louise!

LOUISE.

I *know* it. While you were upstairs dressing we had the most wonderful talk.

ISABELLA.

[*Immediately sobered.*] What about?

LOUISE.

It was not so much what we said as what we left unsaid. When you sent for me I asked him if he wished me to leave him, and he said "No." He begged me to remain. He was longing to confide in me. I *felt* it. He knows he has made a mistake. He was just on the point of admitting to me that Maggie Cottrell is *not* the girl for him to marry—when you came into the room.

ISABELLA.

[*Hardly knowing whether to believe* LOUISE *or not.*] I think it must be *your* imagination.

LOUISE.

You are responsible for what has happened. *You* invited me here. *You* encouraged me to fall in love with him.

ISABELLA.

There's no harm done, because you are *not* in love with him.

LOUISE.

I soon could be. [ISABELLA *turns away*.]
Please let me stay behind.

ISABELLA.

[*With determination*.] No.

LOUISE.

[*Falling on her knees in despair and grasping ISABELLA by the hand*.] Isabella! Isabella! It's a crisis.

ISABELLA.

[*Very uneasy*.] Louise! Louise! Suppose somebody comes in! [*She wrenches her hand away*. LOUISE *sinks upon the ground*.]

[*Enter MRS. HIGSON who has a white linen table-cloth folded over her arm, and a small tray-cloth*.]

MRS. HIGSON.

The cab's here, ma'am.

ISABELLA.

Thank you, Mrs. Higson. [MRS. HIGSON *lays the cloth down and begins to gather the articles together on the writing-table.* ISABELLA *is very firm as she addresses* LOUISE.] Are you ready?

[LOUISE *rises slowly and tragically from the ground.* ISABELLA *pulls her up to her feet.* LOUISE *slaps her as she releases herself.* ISABELLA *goes to the door, pauses, turns to LOUISE, and beckons her, as she says "Louise!"* She waits till she sees LOUISE *begin to follow her, then goes out.* LOUISE *pauses at the door, then hastily closes it and turns to* MRS. HIGSON.

LOUISE.

By the way, Mrs. Higson, I may arrive home a little in advance of the others.

MRS. HIGSON.

[*Stiffly.*] Indeed!

LOUISE.

In case you should want to go to bed early—[*smiles at* MRS. HIGSON *in her most ingratiating manner as she comes towards her*] is there an extra latch-key?

MRS. HIGSON.

[*Mistrustfully.*] Oh, no, miss—we've got no extra latch-keys.

LOUISE.

Oh! [*Pauses.*] You needn't tell anybody I asked you for one.

[*MRS. HIGSON makes no response, but busies herself with the things on ROBIN'S desk. While she is doing this LOUISE fumbles in her bag and takes out a ten-shilling piece. LOUISE offers MRS. HIGSON the ten-shilling piece with her sweetest smile.*

MRS. HIGSON.

[*Not offering to take it.*] Thank you, miss—it will do when you leave.

LOUISE.

Oh! [*She puts the ten-shilling piece in her bag, then goes to the door, where she pauses.*] You needn't tell anybody I offered it to you.

[*Exit LOUISE. MRS. HIGSON ironically kisses her hand after LOUISE, then unfolds the small table-cloth, and lays it on MISS HESELTINE'S desk.*

[*Enter GLADYS with a tray containing the glass and silver, etc., necessary for ROBIN'S dinner.*

GLADYS.

They're off. I think they must be late.

MRS. HIGSON.

What makes you say that? Mr. Burgess is never late with his cab.

GLADYS.

I only thought they might be because Mrs. Worthington was that impatient—wouldn't get into the keb without Miss Parker got in first. Looked as if there'd 'ave bin words if Captain Worthington 'adn't pushed 'em both in from be'ind.

MRS. HIGSON.

'Elp me lay this cloth. [*They lay the cloth together as she continues.*] I'm sure I don't wonder he wants to dine quietly in his study after all the racket there's been this afternoon.

GLADYS.

[*Grinning.*] They were playin' 'ide-an'-go-seek.

MRS. HIGSON.

[*Contemptuously, as she smooths the cloth.*] 'Ide-an'-go-seek! What it's going to be like here after 'e's married, I can't think. Pandemonium, I should say, with dirt on all the carpets.

GLADYS.

I shan't mind the extra work if it makes things 'um a bit more.

MRS. HIGSON.

Careful with that silver.

GLADYS.

Cook and I was only saying this afternoon it was quite refreshing to look out upon somethin' besides lawns and flowers and green trees.

MRS. HIGSON.

You won't welcome changes so much when you reach my age. And it's not as if you'd known Mr. Worthington the years I 'ave. And per'aps you 'aven't got the maternal instinct.

GLADYS.

[*Primly.*] No, I 'aven't—an' I 'ope I won't 'ave before I get my marriage lines.

MRS. HIGSON.

I think that's everything now.

[*Enter* ROBIN. *He wears a dinner-jacket and a black tie.*]

ROBIN.

[*Speaking as he enters.*] I'll have my dinner as soon as it's ready.

[*He takes a book from the bookshelves.*

MRS. HIGSON.

Gladys! Tell cook. [*Exit GLADYS.*

[*The front door bell rings. ROBIN pauses and listens.*

ROBIN.

Who's that?

MRS. HIGSON.

Post most likely. What will you take to drink, sir?

ROBIN.

I think I could do with some champagne.

MRS. HIGSON.

Yes, sir.

ROBIN.

A small bottle.

MRS. HIGSON.

Yes, sir.

[*Exit* MRS. HIGSON. ROBIN *settles himself to read*. GLADYS *comes in carrying a roll of typewritten manuscript*.

GLADYS.

If you please, sir—with Miss 'Eseltine's compliments. [*She holds out the roll to* ROBIN.

ROBIN.

[*Taking it.*] Is Miss Heseltine here?

GLADYS.

Just gorn, sir.

ROBIN.

Run after her.

GLADYS.

Yes, sir.

[*She hurries to the door.*

ROBIN.

No, don't.

GLADYS.

No, sir.

[*Exit* GLADYS. ROBIN *spends a moment or two in indecision, looks at the roll of manuscript, leaves it on the settee, rises, crosses to* MISS HESELTINE'S

desk and lays his book upon it ; then he goes to the window, and draws the back curtain. He opens the window and looks out.

ROBIN.

[*Calling—not loudly.*] Miss Heseltine !

[*After a moment or two MISS HESELTINE appears at the window. She wears a long, loose, ready-made coat, a cheap, ordinary-looking hat, and makes, altogether, a somewhat dowdy appearance.*

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Coming just inside the room.*] Did you wish to speak to me ?

[*They are both embarrassed and constrained when they meet. MISS HESELTINE'S manner is extremely prim, to cover her nervousness.*

ROBIN.

[*Referring to the roll of manuscript in his hand, which he takes from the settee.*] What's this thing ?

MISS HESELTINE.

The American article. I thought you might like to look it over before it goes.

ROBIN.

Why didn't you bring it in ?

MISS HESELTINE.

I didn't wish to disturb you.

ROBIN.

I see—thank you—well—— [*Looking at* MISS HESELTINE.] *You* know if it's all right.

MISS HESELTINE.

I can guarantee there are no mistakes in it *now*.

ROBIN.

[*Giving her the roll of manuscript.*] Let it go then.

MISS HESELTINE.

I'll take it home and put it up for post.
[*She is going.*]

ROBIN.

You might as well do that here—at your desk.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Hesitating a moment, she glances at him, and then says.*] Very well—as I'm here. [*Coming to her desk.*] It won't take me but a few minutes.

[*She sits at her desk, opens a drawer and takes out a large envelope in which she places the American article. She does*

this with a good deal of fumbling and fluttering of papers, owing to her nervousness.

ROBIN.

You must have worked very hard to get that ready.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Without looking up.*] It all had to be rewritten.

ROBIN.

I hope you haven't gone without your dinner.
[MISS HESELTINE *begins to address the envelope, apparently not having heard his last remark.*]
You *have* dined—haven't you?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Still addressing the envelope and not looking up.*] Not yet.

ROBIN.

Are you going to have some dinner *now*?

MISS HESELTINE.

I shan't have time. I'm due at an evening party.

ROBIN.

A dinner party?

MISS HESELTINE.

Oh, no—only games.

ROBIN.

You won't get any dinner.

MISS HESELTINE.

There'll be light refreshments handed round most likely.

[She stamps the envelope.]

ROBIN.

[A little embarrassed and shy at giving the invitation.] Look here! I'm having a bit of beefsteak by myself, and Mrs. Higson is so convinced I don't eat enough, she always gives me twice as much as I can manage. Won't you stay and share it with me?

MISS HESELTINE.

[Quickly and nervously as she rises.] Oh, no, thank you—I can't do that.

ROBIN.

You'd much better. You can go to the evening party afterwards.

MISS HESELTINE.

Quite impossible. Thank you all the same.

[She goes towards the window.]

ROBIN.

[*Going after her.*] I shall be wretchedly lonely all by myself. [MISS HESELTINE *pauses and looks at him.*] You'd be doing me a kindness if you'd stay.

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't think I'd better.

ROBIN.

You won't enjoy your party if you don't eat something first.

MISS HESELTINE.

I'm not expecting to enjoy it much, anyhow.

ROBIN.

I shan't enjoy *my* steak if *you* go hungry to your party.

MISS HESELTINE.

Won't you?

ROBIN.

[*Trying to make her sorry for him.*] No. [A pause.] Nor my tomatoes.

MISS HESELTINE.

Really?

ROBIN.

Really.

MISS HESELTINE.

Then I'll stay—just a very few moments.

ROBIN.

[*Smiling.*] That's right. [*He draws the curtain over the window. Enter MRS. HIGSON with a dish containing a steak and tomatoes. ROBIN speaks as MRS. HIGSON enters.*] Set a place for Miss Heseltine. She's going to have some dinner with me.

MRS. HIGSON.

Yes, sir. [MRS. HIGSON *neither shows nor feels any surprise when she hears that MISS HESELTINE is going to dine with ROBIN.*] We'd better cook you something extra, sir.

ROBIN.

I expect there's enough here. [*He raises the dish cover to see.*] Oh, yes, quite.

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't think I *can* stay—really!

ROBIN.

Oh, yes, you can! [*To MRS. HIGSON.*] A place for Miss Heseltine.

MRS. HIGSON.

Yes, sir.

[Exit MRS. HIGSON.]

ROBIN.

[Smiling at the dish and taking a long sniff.]
Smells good—doesn't it?

MISS HESELTINE.

[Glancing longingly at the dish.] Delicious!
But what about this? [She holds up the envelope in her hand.] I think I'd better take it to the post. I could slip it in the letter-box on my way to the party.

ROBIN.

[Taking the envelope out of her hand.] I'll send somebody with that. [He throws the envelope down.] Won't you take your things off? [He brings a chair to the table. When he has done this, he stands with his hands on the back of the chair, watching MISS HESELTINE take her things off. MISS HESELTINE takes off her hat. Her hair is prettily arranged, quite different from the usual plain style in which she wears it. She next takes off her coat and places it on the chair with her hat. When she has taken off her coat she appears in a pretty, but simple and modest evening dress, in which she looks altogether charming. ROBIN cannot conceal his pleasure in her unexpected appearance.]

I've never seen you in an evening dress before.
[*Enter MRS. HIGSON with the extra glasses, plates, knives, forks, etc., etc., necessary for MISS HESELTINE, a small bottle of champagne and a cork-screw. ROBIN opens the bottle of champagne indicating the envelope containing the American article as he says to MRS. HIGSON.*] Will you have that thing sent to the post at once?

MRS. HIGSON.

Yes, sir. [*Picks up the envelope.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Murmuring, half-fascinated and half-alarmed.*] Champagne!

ROBIN.

Now then, Miss Heseltine, are you ready?
[*ROBIN sits behind the table. MISS HESELTINE sits at the end of it. ROBIN speaks next as MRS. HIGSON takes off the dish-cover.*] I told you she always gives me much more than I can eat.

[*Smiles at MRS. HIGSON, who smilingly goes off with the dish-cover and the envelope.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

I only want a very little corner.

ROBIN.

[*Cutting a piece off the steak.*] Like that?

MISS HESELTINE.

It's too much !

ROBIN.

Nonsense ! Tomato ?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes, please. [*He serves her.*] Thank you !
[*Then he helps himself.*]

ROBIN.

I hope you won't find it too underdone.

MISS HESELTINE.

Oh, no, thank you ; I prefer it underdone.

ROBIN.

How fortunate we both like our meat cooked the same way. [ROBIN *offers to pour some champagne into* MISS HESELTINE'S *glass.*] May I give you some champagne ?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*In a flurry, not able to make up her mind whether to accept champagne or not.*] Oh—I don't know—no, I don't think so, thank you.

ROBIN.

Just a drop. [*He pours it out.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

Is it nice ?

ROBIN.

[*Filling his own glass.*] You know what it's like.

MISS HESELTINE.

No, I don't. I never tasted it.

ROBIN.

[*Surprised.*] Never tasted champagne?

MISS HESELTINE.

No.

ROBIN.

How's that?

MISS HESELTINE.

Quite a lot of people have never tasted champagne.

ROBIN.

Think of that, now. [*He takes a good long drink. MISS HESELTINE watches him with curiosity, then raises her own glass to her lips, frowning as she takes a little sip. ROBIN watches her with an amused smile till she takes the glass away from her lips.*] Do you like it?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Her frown relaxing slowly into a beaming smile.*] Yes.

[From here on she becomes much more at home and quite natural and easy in her manner.]

ROBIN.

[Eating.] I begin to feel better now. I was nearly dead after those children had gone home.

MISS HESELTINE.

[Also eating.] I'm not surprised.

ROBIN.

[Smiling.] I adore their youth and their vigour; the movements of their strong straight limbs; their shouts and their bright, pretty faces. Enchanting! *[With a sigh.]* But it's no use trying to be one of them after forty.

MISS HESELTINE.

It's a change to be dining like this.

ROBIN.

Such a picnic.

MISS HESELTINE.

I mean, it's a change from high tea.

ROBIN.

[Smiling at her.] How different you look this evening!

MISS HESELTINE.

It's because I'm dressed up. *You've* always seen me in workaday.

ROBIN.

Your hair looks so pretty. I never noticed before that your hair was so pretty.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Pleased.*] My hair is my best feature.

ROBIN.

Do you often go to parties ?

MISS HESELTINE.

Oh, no—very seldom. I have such a limited circle of acquaintances in Farnham. I don't get much chance of meeting people, for one thing ; and, living alone, the way I do, I need to be cautious. It's very easy to find oneself swallowed up in the wrong set before one knows it.

ROBIN.

[*With deep meaning, thinking of the Cottrells.*] Very ! I suppose you'll go to plenty of parties when you live in London.

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't expect to. I've lived there before, you know. I find London much more dead and alive than Farnham.

ROBIN.

[*Amazed.*] London dead and alive !

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes.

ROBIN.

I left because it's so noisy.

MISS HESELTINE.

You had your friends and your telephone. I only had a bed-sitting room. I scarcely ever went out with any one except my landlady, and not very often with *her*. We occasionally did a pit if we felt flush.

ROBIN.

[*Sympathetically.*] Is that the kind of life you have to look forward to now ?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Simply.*] Yes.

ROBIN.

You've lived by yourself a long time ?

MISS HESELTINE.

Ever since father married again.

ROBIN.

[*Gloomily.*] When *I'm* married, I suppose there'll be jolly tennis parties and gaiety and

fun every day of the week. [*He looks at her.*]
I wonder what is to become of me and my work
when *you* go?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Troubled.*] I don't believe I *could* stay on.
[*She sits back.*]

ROBIN.

[*Nervously.*] No.

MISS HESELTINE.

It wouldn't do.

ROBIN.

No. [*He lays his knife and fork together,
and assumes a businesslike manner.*] Have
you finished?

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes, thank you.

[*She lays her knife and fork together.*]

ROBIN.

I don't think we need ring the bell. *I'll*
change the plates. [*He rises to do so.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Rising and speaking as if she were asking
him a favour.*] Let me.

ROBIN.

Oh, no ; I'll do it.

MISS HESELTINE.

I should like to. Please sit down and let me—let me wait upon you.

ROBIN.

[*Humouring her.*] Very well. [*He sits.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Taking his plate as she says, smiling.*] “It was Sunday evening, and both the servants had gone to church ; so, as their custom was on these occasions, they waited on themselves.”

ROBIN.

What's that ?

MISS HESELTINE.

A quotation out of one of your books.

ROBIN.

Which one ?

MISS HESELTINE.

It never had a name. You began it about four years ago, and tore it up after the second chapter.

ROBIN.

What a memory you have !

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes, for some things.

[*While this conversation is going on
MISS HESELTINE changes the dishes
and plates.*]

ROBIN.

It doesn't seem right for me to be sitting here while you do the waiting.

MISS HESELTINE.

It pleases me.

ROBIN.

I never thought of waiting at table being a pleasure.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Standing near him with a dish in her hands.*]
It is, if you know how to dream.

ROBIN.

[*Not comprehending—echoes.*] To dream !

MISS HESELTINE.

More than half a woman's life is made of dreams. She couldn't bear it otherwise.

[*She places the dish on the table.*]

ROBIN.

What's the good of a dream ?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*With suppressed exaltation.*] Sometimes it grows so vivid it almost seems to have come true. [*She gives a low-toned little laugh as she looks towards her desk.* ROBIN looks at her and follows the direction of her eyes.] That's my desk that I work at—our sideboard is. [*She goes to her desk.* ROBIN watches her, smiling. *She carries the dish of fruit and two plates to the table, and places them in front of him.*] I shall never be able to believe this really happened afterwards. [*She returns to her place as she says.*] I expect I shall be trying to remember what story it was, where we dined together. Whenever you dictate a novel to me I always imagine that I'm the heroine.

ROBIN.

[*Offering to refill her glass.*] Let me give you some more champagne?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Putting her hand over her glass.*] No, thank you. [*Gravely.*] They tell me it makes one chatter.

ROBIN.

Please chatter. I want to know more about you—[*handing her fruit*] what you think, what you feel, what you are like, what you do with

yourself when you are away from me. Though I've known you so well for—how long is it?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Promptly.*] Five years last first of June.

ROBIN.

And how many hours in all that time have we spent alone in this room together?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Joyfully.*] So many we couldn't possibly count them up.

ROBIN.

And yet, after all that, I am only just beginning to get to know you. Why did you never tell me about yourself?

MISS HESELTINE.

You never asked.

ROBIN.

I wonder why.

MISS HESELTINE.

You were always working.

ROBIN.

[*After a moment's reflection.*] What a lot of time one wastes attending to one's work. [*They*

go on eating before ROBIN *says.*] I suppose I'm always thinking about myself and my own things.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Kindly.*] That's only because you are a man. [*He laughs. She becomes a little confused.*] Though I'm sure I don't know why I should be talking as if I knew all about it. I've never known any man well with the exception of you and father.

ROBIN.

Will you tell me about your father?

[*He takes a cigarette-case from his pocket.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

I'd rather not. I was very unhappy at home—and to-night I want to forget all painful things. I am weaving a wonderful memory for the lonely evenings to come. [ROBIN *sighs.*] You want a light for your cigarette. Wait there, I'll get you one.

[MISS HESELTINE *goes to the mantel-piece for a match, which she strikes, then holds while he lights his cigarette.*
ROBIN *offers her his cigarette-case.*]

ROBIN.

Will you have a cigarette?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Primly.*] Oh, no, thank you—I don't think I'll go as far as that.

[*She returns to her place at the table.*]

ROBIN.

[*After a pause.*] How restful you are!

MISS HESELTINE.

Will you always think of me so? I should like you to think of me, after I'm gone, a little differently from anybody else.

ROBIN.

I can promise you that. [*He smokes in silence a moment before he says gloomily.*] It gets worse and worse the more I think of it.

MISS HESELTINE.

What does?

ROBIN.

Your going away. I don't see how we shall ever get through when it comes to the last day—our last morning's work. It's so sad doing *anything* the last time if it's something one has done regularly every day for a long time.

MISS HESELTINE.

I remember when I left home—the last Sunday evening we sang a hymn. We always sang

a hymn on Sunday evening—the same hymn. I *was* so sick of it. I used to have to play the tune. I thought I should be so glad never to have to do it any more; but when it came to doing it the last time, I couldn't see the notes. I couldn't see the words, I couldn't see the others—I was crying so.

ROBIN.

I shan't know what has become of you. You might be unhappy or badly off, for all that *I* shall know.

MISS HESELTINE.

I might write perhaps—now and again.

ROBIN.

[*Sadly.*] Letters! Once a week, once a month, two or three times a year. I shall want to see you every day.

MISS HESELTINE.

I shall want to see you, too.

[*They look at each other steadily for some time before he speaks.*]

ROBIN.

You look as you looked this afternoon. It's a wonderful look. I have never seen it in a woman's eyes before. [*He pulls himself to-*

gether, disgusted with himself.] I'm ashamed—I'm ashamed to have said that.

[He rises from the table.

MISS HESELTINE.

[Also risen—very gently and kindly.] Don't be ashamed. I'm glad you *know* I love you. *[ROBIN turns and looks at her.]* You've taken it so kindly, I feel as if a great load had been lifted off my heart. I've been set free—after years of oppression. The pain it has been to keep my secret all to myself. Like a child, I had no right to, I hugged it and hid it—fearful lest some one should discover it, and I should be disgraced. And now *you*—of all people—have found me out, and I'm not humiliated—I'm happy. Though I know that to-morrow is coming, to-night I can only feel—how good it is for me that you should know.

ROBIN.

[Slowly, quietly, and impressively.] It seems to me now as if I had always known. So silently and steadily your influence has grown, it possessed me unawares. *[Speaking with sudden, passionate energy.]* I've made a dreadful blunder. I'm terrified of my future. I can't face it! *[MISS HESELTINE sits on the settee. He moves about as he speaks rapidly and excitedly.]* I was content the way we went on

till Henry and Isabella came. It was seeing *them*—their happiness, their affection, their kisses, and caresses. I determined to marry and be happy, as they are. I looked about me for a wife, thought of all the girls I knew—all except *one*. *You* were so near at hand, and I was looking out into the world. I was caught and carried away by the snares of the charm of youth. I only see *you* in my work-time—always quiet, always patient, always ready, and never exacting. I took all that as a matter of course—selfishly accepted it. How dull of me never to have thought—what wonderful qualities those in a woman! [*Speaking like a lover, as he sits on the settee beside her.*] I have never seen you as you are to-night. [*MISS HESELTINE rises slowly and steps back from him, fascinated, but afraid. He goes on passionately.*] I ought to be holding my tongue, stifling my heart as *you* did yours; but to-night I can't any more than you can. I *can't* marry Maggie; it's not possible. She's dear, she's sweet, she's lovely; but she's a child. She knows nothing, feels nothing, understands nothing. She has no soul, and very little heart. If I marry Maggie, I shall be finished, destroyed, done for. And *now*—now that I *know* that I love *you* and that *you* love *me*! [*Helplessly.*] What are we to do?

[*They stand looking helplessly at each*

other ; then by a mutual instinct go towards each other, and fall into each other's arms. They remain some moments locked in a close embrace. The curtains over the windows are parted. LOUISE is there. She has time to stand and take in the situation before they discover her presence. LOUISE advances into the room, then moves slowly and haughtily to the door, observing the dinner-table as she passes it. ROBIN and MISS HESELTINE watch her, dumbfounded. LOUISE goes out. MISS HESELTINE turns and looks at ROBIN, then covers her face with her hands.

THE CURTAIN COMES SLOWLY DOWN

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE.—ROBIN'S study again. *It is ten o'clock in the morning on the day after the events of the last two acts.* ROBIN is seated at his writing-table, his head on his hands. Enter LADY COTTRELL. ROBIN rises when she enters.

LADY COTTRELL.

My husband has had a note from you asking him to come and see you—so I came.

ROBIN.

[*Worried.*] Oh, but I want most particularly to see *Sir Richard*. That's why I asked him to call on *me* instead of going to call on *him* because—well, you know what it's like at *your* house. There's no privacy. Dickie or Maggie or one of the others is apt to burst into the room at any moment. I must see Sir Richard undisturbed. It's most important. I think I'll run over and see him now—if you'll excuse me. [*He picks up a newspaper and thrusts it into LADY COTTRELL'S hands.*] There's the paper. I'll send Isabella to you to keep you company.

[*Exit* ROBIN, *quickly.*]

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Looking after ROBIN in surprise.*] Odd![ISABELLA *enters followed by* HENRY.]

ISABELLA.

[*Speaking as she enters.*] Good-morning,
Lady Cottrell.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Nods unceremoniously to them both without rising or offering to shake hands.*] Good-morning, good-morning. What's the matter?

ISABELLA.

Nothing.

HENRY.

Why?

LADY COTTRELL.

[*To HENRY.*] I thought from your brother's strange manner that something must have happened since I saw you yesterday.

HENRY.

[*Looking at ISABELLA.*] Not that I know of.

ISABELLA.

Nothing unusual.

HENRY.

We dined at the Hendersons' last evening.

LADY COTTRELL.

Nothing else?

ISABELLA.

[*Looking at HENRY.*] No.

HENRY.

Miss Parker had a headache and left the party early. When we got home she had gone to bed; so *we* went to bed, too—and—that's about all. We got up and had breakfast as usual this morning.

LADY COTTRELL.

Nothing of any *importance*.

ISABELLA.

[*Seriously.*] Baby was rather fretful in the night.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Contemptuously.*] You won't call that important when you've got fourteen.

[*Enter LOUISE. She enters quickly, and with such an air of having something important to tell that she attracts all their attention. They watch her as she closes the door and comes down among them.*]

LOUISE.

I waited till Mr. Worthington went out. There is something I think you all ought to know. Sit down.

[She pushes ISABELLA into a chair and waves the others to their seats.]

LADY COTTRELL.

I knew there was something.

[They watch LOUISE expectantly.]

LOUISE.

Last night, when I left the Hendersons' *[to LADY COTTRELL]* I came away before the others. I had a headache. *[To ISABELLA.]* You remember. *[Addressing them all.]* I slipped away without a word, not wishing to make a fuss. I got my cloak and when I came out at their front door I was fortunate enough to find a cab. *[To ISABELLA.]* The one that brought that man who came after dinner. *[Addressing them all.]* I told the cabman to drive me to this gate, where I got out. *[To LADY COTTRELL.]* It was such a fine moonlight night I thought I should like to walk up the drive. When I got near the house I heard sounds of revelry—*[she looks round from one to the other expecting to make a great effect ;*

they watch her with unmoved faces during the whole of her recital] issuing from this window—sounds of revelry. [*She looks round at them all again.*] I naturally thought it rather strange, so I stopped outside the window and listened. I thought it might be the servants taking advantage of our absence. Not at all. I distinctly heard two voices—Mr. Worthington's and a woman's. [*She looks from one to the other as before expecting to make an effect—they all move forward slightly.*] I was just going to pass on when a little gust of wind blew the curtains apart. There was nothing for me to do then but to walk into the room. I hardly like to tell you what I saw—but I *must*. It's a duty. The table was all in disorder as if two people had been feasting together. I remember noticing a champagne bottle—*empty*. The next thing I saw was—Miss Heseltine—the typewriter—in an evening dress. She was in Mr. Worthington's arms. They were kissing each other.

[*She looks round at them all triumphantly expecting to make a sensation. She apparently makes no effect of any kind. They sit still gravely for some moments before LADY COTTRELL speaks.*

LADY COTTRELL.

[*With perfect composure.*] I don't believe a word of it.

ISABELLA.

Nor do I.

HENRY.

Nor I.

LOUISE.

[*Annoyed at the reception of her story.*] But I *saw* it.

LADY COTTRELL.

Dreamt it! Robin and his typist—I no more believe it than if you'd told me you'd caught Captain Worthington there kissing *me*.

ISABELLA.

[*In dismay at the thought of such a thing.*] Oh!

LOUISE.

If you don't believe *me*, ask the servants. *They* can tell you whether Miss Heseltine dined here or not.

LADY COTTRELL.

Why shouldn't Miss Heseltine dine here? [*To HENRY.*] Do *you* see any reason why she shouldn't?

HENRY.

No reason on earth.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*To LOUISE.*] We none of us see any reason against it.

ISABELLA.

They probably had some business to discuss.

LOUISE.

They were drinking champagne.

HENRY.

Why shouldn't they drink champagne?

ISABELLA.

We drank it ourselves at the Hendersons'.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*To HENRY and ISABELLA.*] She seems to think it's immoral to drink champagne.

LOUISE.

The woman was *décolleté*.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*To LOUISE.*] Is it the fashion where *you* come from to dine high neck?

LOUISE.

Oh!

ISABELLA.

[*To* LADY COTTRELL.] I think Louise has gone mad.

HENRY.

[*To* LADY COTTRELL, *on the other side.*] Trying to find a queer meaning to a most ordinary proceeding. It's monstrous!

ISABELLA.

Disgusting!

LADY COTTRELL.

Foul!

HENRY.

If he mayn't dine quietly with his secretary.

ISABELLA.

It may be indiscreet.

LADY COTTRELL.

Don't be so provincial, Mrs. Worthington. It isn't at all indiscreet. It might be for *some* people if they were that kind of person, but a serious man of *his* age dining alone with his typist to talk about his business, dressed in suitable clothes and drinking what I often drink myself,—I can't see anything in it at all.

LOUISE.

They were clasped together in a wild embrace.

LADY COTTRELL.

That I refuse to believe.

HENRY.

So do I, absolutely.

ISABELLA.

And so do I.

LOUISE.

Can't you see what it all means? We were all to have dined at the Hendersons' last evening—we three—and Mr. Worthington. At the last moment Mr. Worthington backs out—says he wishes to dine *alone*. *We* are packed off. In our absence comes this woman. Not a word to any of us to say she is expected. I arrive home early and find them in this most compromising position. And it's not only what took place last evening. Think of the hours and hours a day they spend shut up in this room together.

HENRY.

Working.

LOUISE.

[*Sharply to him.*] How do *we* know what goes on?

[HENRY and ISABELLA exclaim together.]

HENRY.

What d'you mean ?

ISABELLA.

Louise !

LOUISE.

[*Ignoring their exclamations, turns to* LADY COTTRELL.] You surely won't let your daughter be engaged to a man while he is carrying on an intrigue with another woman.

ISABELLA.

[*Indignantly.*] Louise !

HENRY.

[*At the same time that* ISABELLA *exclaims.*] Really, Miss Parker, I ——

[*All except* LADY COTTRELL *talk at once.*

LADY COTTRELL.

[*With authority.*] Leave her to me. [*She addresses* LOUISE *calmly but witheringly.*] We decline to believe one word of *your* unsupported testimony against our *friends*. You have told us what is untrue. We *know* Mr. Worthington. He is a man of exceedingly high character. As for Miss Heseltine, I cannot say that I *know her*—but I have observed her. She satisfies me. I am convinced that she is a most respectable young woman.

LOUISE.

How can you tell by *observing* a woman whether she is respectable or not?

LADY COTTRELL.

I can *sniff* the difference.

LOUISE.

[*To ISABELLA.*] Surely *you* see —

ISABELLA.

Hush, Louise. I'm ashamed of you—trying to make a scandal out of nothing.

LOUISE.

[*Excitedly.*] But it's *true*, I tell you—it's *true*. They'll deny it, of course, and there's no one to support my word, but it's true, it's true, it's true!

HENRY.

[*Indignantly.*] You've said enough and a great deal more than enough. I take it upon myself in my brother's absence to tell you to leave the house.

LOUISE.

Oh!

HENRY.

How you can do such a thing as this—after accepting Robin's hospitality—I can't trust my-

self to say what I think of your conduct. You will please leave the house at once.

LOUISE.

Do you think I would consent to remain one moment longer in such a house as *this*?

ISABELLA.

Louise!

LOUISE.

[*Addressing ISABELLA.*] If *you* can't see what's perfectly plain to any intelligent person—that's *your* lookout.

LADY COTTRELL.

Hush!

LOUISE.

It shall never be said of *me* that I condoned immorality. I leave for Leamington immediately—immediately.

[*Exit LOUISE. They watch her go out, and then look at each other in amazement.*]

LADY COTTRELL.

What is she thinking of to come to us with such a story? What is her motive?

ISABELLA.

I know well enough what her motive is.

LADY COTTRELL.

Tell us.

ISABELLA.

Something must have happened last night. He probably repulsed her, and this is her revenge.

HENRY.

I see.

LADY COTTRELL.

I don't.

HENRY.

[*To ISABELLA.*] I suppose we had better tell Lady Cottrell everything.

ISABELLA.

[*In a whisper to HENRY.*] I don't want her to know why I invited Louise here.

HENRY.

[*To ISABELLA.*] No. [*He goes towards LADY COTTRELL.*] I am sorry to have to tell you, Lady Cottrell, that Miss Parker has been doing her best all the time she has been here to get Robin away from Maggie.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Impressed and concerned.*] Indeed!

ISABELLA.

I've had the most *dreadful* time with her. I haven't known *what* to do. Last evening she actually told me she had had the most wonderful talk with him, and that he had as good as admitted to her that he didn't want to marry Maggie. Of course, I knew it wasn't true; but fancy her *saying* such a thing. And, later on, when Robin backed out of going to the Hendersons', she wanted me to let her stay behind with him. But I wouldn't *hear* of it. I *made* her come to the Hendersons' with *us*.

LADY COTTRELL.

She seems to have found no difficulty in outwitting you when she got there.

ISABELLA.

I couldn't keep my eye on her *all* the time. She got out when I wasn't looking. Then I suppose she hurried home, thinking she would find Robin by himself, and would practice her wiles upon him. But, of course, she found him with Miss Heseltine. Then I should think that he either repulsed her; or, disappointed at not finding him alone, she became so enraged she worked herself into the state of mind in which a woman can make herself believe anything.

LADY COTTRELL.

I suppose she'll go and spread this nasty story.

ISABELLA.

I shouldn't wonder.

[*Enter ROBIN. He halts and looks at them. He is serious and worried. LADY COTTRELL, HENRY, and ISABELLA watch him in silence for a moment.*]

LADY COTTRELL.

[*To HENRY and ISABELLA.*] I think we'd better tell him, don't you? [*They all look at ROBIN. ROBIN looks from one to the other for an explanation. LADY COTTRELL still addresses HENRY and ISABELLA.*] What do you think? Shall we tell him or not? [*HENRY goes slowly to ROBIN, lays his hand kindly on his shoulder for a moment, then walks away. ROBIN watches HENRY, wondering, then turns to LADY COTTRELL and ISABELLA for an explanation.*] Perhaps we had better not tell him after all.

ISABELLA.

I think we shall *have* to tell him.

HENRY.

I think so, too. It appears, Robin, that last evening——

ISABELLA.

I can't think how she *could*.

LADY COTTRELL.

Miss Parker says that Miss Heseltine is your mistress.

[ROBIN *is so taken aback and distressed he can't speak for a moment, but looks round helplessly at the others.*

HENRY.

[*Sympathetically.*] We don't believe it.

ISABELLA.

We told her so.

ROBIN.

Of course it's not true. [*He sits at his desk. They watch him anxiously. After a moment he looks up.*] You'd better tell me what else she said.

HENRY.

She said that you dined here last evening alone with Miss Heseltine.

ROBIN.

That's true.

HENRY.

And that you were drinking champagne.

ROBIN.

That's true.

HENRY.

She also said that you—that she saw you ——

[He hesitates, not quite knowing how to express himself.]

LADY COTTRELL.

Embracing.

ROBIN.

[After a pause.] I want to marry Miss Heseltine. *[They all look at ROBIN, then at each other, mute with surprise. ROBIN addresses LADY COTTRELL.]* That's what I went to tell Sir Richard. I didn't see him. He'd gone out—so I may as well tell *you*. I—I find I've made a mistake, and I don't care for Maggie as much as I thought I did; so the only honourable thing for me to do now is to break off my engagement.

HENRY.

[Dismayed, then slowly perceiving what he imagines to be the truth.] Bravo! *[They all look at HENRY in surprise.]* I call that magnificent. *[To ROBIN.]* To sacrifice yourself in order to save Miss Heseltine's reputation. It's noble.

ROBIN.

[Bewildered.] But ——

ISABELLA.

[*Smiling at ROBIN.*] It's just like you, Robin.

ROBIN.

But ——

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Beaming upon him.*] Most chivalrous!

ROBIN.

[*To LADY COTTRELL.*] Bu' ——

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Holding up her hand to silence ROBIN as she says.*] But don't forget that one may carry chivalry too far and become quixotic.

ROBIN.

You don't understand. I love Miss Heseltine.

[*They all laugh heartily.*]

LADY COTTRELL.

My dear, good man—what *is* the use of trying to bluff *us*?

ROBIN.

[*Coming towards LADY COTTRELL as he speaks.*] I'm very much in earnest, Lady Cottrell. I realize what a very serious matter it is to break off an engagement, and I don't for one moment want to underestimate my responsibilities—but surely it is better to recognize my mistake *now* instead of later on.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Preparing to be indignant.*] To hear you talk one would suppose—oh—[*remembering he is bluffing, as she thinks*] but of course you don't mean it. [*She smiles and pats him on the arm.*]

ROBIN.

Can't you all see that this is quite a likely thing to happen? It's most unfortunate. I am much to blame—but it's not the first time that a man has got engaged and then found out that he loved some one else.

ISABELLA.

[*Sweetly.*] Robin, dear—if it were really true that you love Miss Heseltine—you'd have thought of it before now.

ROBIN.

That's the funny thing about it. I have known her for five years, and I never discovered I was in love with her till last evening.

LADY COTTRELL.

Most unconvincing!

[LADY COTTRELL and ISABELLA laugh.]

ROBIN.

[*Distractedly.*] Can't I make them understand? [*To HENRY.*] You, Henry. You know when I mean a thing——

HENRY.

[*Calmly and kindly and rather pompously.*]
I believe you *would* make this sacrifice, but I shall not let you.

ROBIN.

[*Taken aback by HENRY'S superior attitude.*]
Oh—indeed! [*Derisively.*] You won't let me.
We'll see about that.

HENRY.

It's totally unnecessary. Take the advice of a man of the world; I'm younger than you, I know—but you see—after all—you are only a writer—— [*ROBIN turns to him quickly as if to retort.*] I don't mean to be offensive——

ROBIN.

I'm sure you don't, Henry; but if I *did* happen to want the advice of a man of the world—I should never think of going to a thick-headed soldier.

ISABELLA.

[*Indignantly when HENRY is called a thick-headed soldier.*] Oh!

HENRY.

[*Coming to ISABELLA and speaking indulgently of ROBIN.*] Never mind, dear. The poor old fellow is so upset.

LADY COTTRELL.

[*Reassuring* HENRY and ISABELLA.] He'll come to his senses directly.

HENRY.

I hope so. The trouble with *him* is—he doesn't know life. He lives in a world of his own—a world of romantic books where they indulge in these heroic sacrifices.

ISABELLA.

[*To* ROBIN.] You see, Robin ; even if Louise *did* go and spread this story, nobody would be likely to believe her, so it wouldn't do Miss Heseltine much harm.

HENRY.

We shall *all* do what we can to protect Miss Heseltine.

LADY COTTRELL.

I will befriend the girl. I will go to her now.

ROBIN.

[*Coming quickly towards* LADY COTTRELL.]
No. [Rises.]

LADY COTTRELL.

Where does she live ?

ROBIN.

I shan't tell you.

LADY COTTRELL.

Maggie knows.

ROBIN.

Lady Cottrell! I *can't* let you go to Miss Heseltine. You'll talk her round. She'd pack up her little box and go away without a word.

LADY COTTRELL.

But I'm going to ask her to *stay*. To let every one *see* that there isn't a word of truth in Miss Parker's story—I shall ask Miss Heseltine as a personal favour to *me*—to remain here after your marriage.

ROBIN.

Impossible.

LADY COTTRELL.

Not at all. Maggie is a sensible girl. She knows that every literary man is closeted for hours daily with a typist. She won't be jealous of Miss Heseltine. I'll soon put everything all right. You shall have them both.

[*Exit* LADY COTTRELL.]

ROBIN.

[*Desperately.*] I don't *want* Maggie.

HENRY.

Why?

ROBIN.

She's too young.

ISABELLA.

Three weeks ago you were all for youth.

ROBIN.

I know I was, but I've had enough of it. Maggie is just as sweet and pretty as she was three weeks ago, but now that I've got to know her better—I can't see anything in her at all.

[HENRY and ISABELLA both look extremely shocked.]

ISABELLA.

If he really feels that way about her.

HENRY.

[*Smiles reassuringly at ISABELLA.*] He doesn't. I know exactly how he feels. [*He approaches ROBIN and says kindly.*] You have got what we call in my regiment "Bridegroom's Funk." We all get it as the wedding-day approaches. I'd have given anything to get out of marrying Isabella when it came to the last week.

ISABELLA.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh—oh!

[*She bursts into tears and hurries towards the window.*]

HENRY.

[*Very much distressed, follows* ISABELLA.]
Isabella! Listen! I only meant —

ISABELLA.

[*Wailing as she goes out.*] You don't love me. [Exit ISABELLA.]

HENRY.

Isabella!

[Exit HENRY.]

ROBIN.

Idiots!

[Enter MISS HESELTINE. *She is without her hat.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Pausing on the threshold.*] I didn't know whether to come as usual this morning or not.

ROBIN.

I'm so glad you came. Now at last we can talk sense. Shut the door, please. [MISS HESELTINE *shuts the door and meets him.*] She told.

MISS HESELTINE.

I knew she would.

ROBIN.

They won't believe her.

MISS HESELTINE.

Who won't?

ROBIN.

Lady Cottrell and Henry and Isabella. They won't believe *me* either when I say that I want to break my engagement and marry you.

MISS HESELTINE.

Has Maggie been told?

ROBIN.

Not yet. She won't believe it when she *is*, and even if she *does*, they'll all be at her, telling her I don't mean what I say and urge her not to let me off. I don't know what to do. They won't any of them believe anything. It would be awfully funny if it wasn't *us*.

[He paces up and down.]

MISS HESELTINE.

I never thought of them taking it this way. It simplifies it for us very much.

ROBIN.

[Not comprehending.] Simplifies it?

MISS HESELTINE.

If they none of them believe there's been anything between us.

ROBIN.

It leaves me more than ever engaged to Maggie.

MISS HESELTINE.

I don't want to make trouble.

ROBIN.

[*Anxiously.*] Oh, I say, you don't feel differently about me this morning, do you?

[*He holds her hand.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

[*It is evident that she loves him more than ever.*] After what you said to me last night? No. [*With determination.*] But I don't think it right or reasonable that I should come between you and not only Maggie, but your family and friends.

ROBIN.

[*Grimly.*] I've got you *all* against me now.

MISS HESELTINE.

What could I bring you for all that you would lose? I've got no arts to hold you with, nor beauty. I could only love you and work for you. That isn't always enough.

ROBIN.

There's every reason why you and I should marry. Let alone the *great* reason. Leaving

love out of the question it's the only sensible thing to do. We suit each other. We have mutual interests and ideas. The same things make us laugh. Besides which, we've got accustomed. I feel no strangeness in your company, none of that wearisome effort to be a kind of person that I'm nothing like. With *you* I could live my life, I could do my work, I could be myself. Whereas with Maggie—poor Maggie! It isn't her fault she's so tiresome. It's the fault of her youth.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Troubled.*] I can't but remember that it was *I* who sounded her for you—here in this room—three weeks ago to-day.

ROBIN.

I don't think she cares for me much. I don't think it's in her to care for any one much.

MISS HESELTINE.

That's what we *want* to think.

ROBIN.

[*With determination.*] If I were to marry Maggie now, I should do her a very great wrong. [MISS HESELTINE *shakes her head.*] Oh, yes I should. If I take her away from the home where she's happy, playing with her brothers and her friends, bring her here and

don't love her—can't love her—it would be cruel. I *must* tell her everything. I'll go and see her now at once.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Anxiously.*] You will tell her, I suppose, and then let her choose.

ROBIN.

[*Pausing.*] Choose?

MISS HESELTINE.

Choose whether she will give you up or not.

ROBIN.

Suppose she chooses not to?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Simply.*] You would have done the right thing.

ROBIN.

[*Doubtfully.*] Yes. [*After a moment's reflection.*] But I should still be saddled with Maggie. I *can't* pass the rest of my days with a young woman who has no idea of life beyond extracting the utmost merriment out of each moment. I shall tell her just as kindly and as gently as I can, but ——— [*Enter MAGGIE.*

MAGGIE.

Good-morning.

ROBIN.

Good-morning, Maggie.

MAGGIE.

I thought perhaps you'd be by yourself.

MISS HESELTINE.

Am I in the way ?

ROBIN.

[*To MAGGIE.*] Do you want to see me alone ?

MAGGIE.

What I *really* wanted was to see her first and you after.

ROBIN.

Shall I leave you here with Miss Heseltine ?

MAGGIE.

Let me think. [*She considers a moment while they watch her.*] No ; on second thoughts, I'll take you both together. I think I should feel more courageous. And I shall only have to go over the ground twice if I don't. [*To MISS HESELTINE.*] *You* are in the secret because, if you remember, you sounded me about him.

MISS HESELTINE.

I haven't forgotten.

MAGGIE.

[*Addressing them both.*] Would you mind seating yourselves? [MAGGIE *watches them seat themselves first then she speaks very amiably, addressing* ROBIN.] I don't think you are suited to *me*. I like you very much. You are every bit as nice as you were three weeks ago, but now that I've got to know you better, I find that you depress me. [ROBIN *and* MISS HESELTINE *look at each other trying very hard not to smile.*] When you play with us, for instance, I always feel you are trying to be another kind of person from the one you really are, and that you aren't thoroughly enjoying yourself, and then *I* can't enjoy myself either. It isn't your fault. It's the fault of your age. I don't mean to say you are *old*, but you are not quite *this* generation, are you?

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Protesting.*] Oh!

[ROBIN *and* MAGGIE *look towards* MISS HESELTINE.

ROBIN.

[*Smiling at* MISS HESELTINE *as he says.*] There are always *two* points of view.

MAGGIE.

[*To MISS HESELTINE.*] It's no use *half* saying it or he won't catch my meaning.

ROBIN.

I catch your meaning all right.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*To herself in an undertone.*] He is *this* generation.

MAGGIE.

[*To ROBIN.*] It was yesterday it was borne in upon me so powerfully the immense difference in our ages. You mustn't think I haven't thought about this very seriously. I sat up quite late last night, talking it all over with Bertha. We came to the conclusion that it isn't fair to ask a girl of my age to marry a man who has had his day.

MISS HESELTINE.

[*Springing up and saying indignantly to MAGGIE.*] Oh, no!

MAGGIE.

[*To MISS HESELTINE.*] See here! *You* were asked to stay in the room to give me your moral support.

MISS HESELTINE.

I know I was—but when I hear you talk like that about him—even a secretary has her feelings.

MAGGIE.

[*Kindly to MISS HESELTINE.*] I mean to say—*he* has lived and I haven't. The world isn't all new and exciting to him the way it is to me. I want parties and people all the time. He's had all that and wants to settle down. There's the difference between us.

ROBIN.

You've hit the nail on the head, Maggie.

MAGGIE.

[*Going to ROBIN.*] There's something else I must tell you—something you may not like.

ROBIN.

[*Smiling hopefully.*] You've fallen in love with a boy of your own age.

MAGGIE.

Oh, no.

MISS HESELTINE.

A man of your own age.

MAGGIE.

Nothing of that sort. It's this. There used

to be some notion that it wasn't honourable for a girl to break off her engagement unless the man were willing to set her free.

ROBIN.

[*Pretending to* MAGGIE *to be seriously impressed.*] Indeed.

MAGGIE.

People don't hold that notion now.

MISS HESELTINE.

You don't say so!

MAGGIE.

[*To* ROBIN.] I thought you might be old-fashioned and want to hold me to my promise.

ROBIN.

[*Airily.*] Oh, dear me, no—you'll find me quite up-to-date on that point.

MAGGIE.

[*Looking at* ROBIN *with admiration.*] I must say you are taking it splendidly.

ROBIN.

[*Trying to speak gravely.*] I am doing my best to disguise my feelings.

[*Enter* LOUISE. *She wears the travelling clothes in which she arrived in the first act, and seems rather hysterical.*]

LOUISE.

[*Crying.*] I'm not one to make trouble, but I think you ought to know that I am being turned out of the house for telling the truth. [*Addressing* ROBIN.] I owe it to myself to justify myself before the girl you are engaged to. [*Looking at* MAGGIE.] Last night —

ROBIN.

[*Interrupting her.*] No, Miss Parker, no. I can't allow that. Besides, Miss Cottrell and I are no longer engaged.

LOUISE.

[*Greatly surprised.*] What?

ROBIN.

She has broken it off.

LOUISE.

Good gracious !

MAGGIE.

[*Going to* ROBIN, *says kindly.*] I do hope you'll be able to find some one to console yourself with—[*with a meaning look and smile towards* LOUISE] some older person ; some one who wants to get married as much as you do. [*Whispering.*] We've all noticed how fond she is of you. [*She goes to* MISS HESELTINE *and takes her by the arm.*] Come, let us leave them together.

MISS HESELTINE.

No.

[LOUISE glides slowly towards ROBIN with her most seductive smile. He steps back a step or two, very much embarrassed, as she approaches. Enter ISABELLA and HENRY.

ISABELLA.

[Speaking as she enters.] Louise !

LOUISE.

[Annoyed at being interrupted, says irritably.] What is it?

ISABELLA.

Your cab is here.

LOUISE.

You may send it away again.

[Smiling and unfastening her coat as if she were going to stay.

MAGGIE.

[To ROBIN.] I'm sure you'll be happy together. I must be off home to tell mother what I've done.

[Exit MAGGIE.

ROBIN.

[Bracing himself.] Miss Parker.

LOUISE.

[Smiling up at him.] Louise.

ROBIN.

The next time you tell the truth please tell the whole of it, and add that Miss Heseltine and I are going to be married. [*To MISS HESELTINE.*] I suppose we are going to get married, aren't we? [*Taking her hands.*]

MISS HESELTINE.

Yes, please.

LOUISE.

[*Rising majestically and giving her hand to* ROBIN.] Good-bye, Mr. Worthington.

ROBIN.

Good-bye, Miss Parker. It has been such a pleasure having you here.

LOUISE.

Stop the cab!

[HENRY and ISABELLA bolt out of the door. LOUISE stalks out majestically. MISS HESELTINE sits down at her desk and begins writing on the typewriter. ROBIN comes behind her, gently draws her hands from the machine, and embraces her.]

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